

# HOMESTEAD & Mifflin Township HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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"Preserving Our Past...For Future Generations"

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## MUNHALL HISTORY

*Compiled from various sources*

The Borough was named after John Munhall, one of the early homesteaders of the area with coal mining and railroad operations on it.

The first known pioneer settler in the Munhall area of Mifflin Township was Sebastian Frederick. Bastian Freithrick (the original spelling of his name from ship's logs) was a German immigrant and arrived in Philadelphia in the year 1749. He then moved to an area in northern Virginia along the Potomac River. The Frederick family settled along the banks of the Monongahela River and built a cabin and a barn and began clearing the land. Bastian Frederick also had a son, Sebastian, Jr., who helped him carve his farm from the frontier. A certificate for commission of some 400 acres was given to him on April 26, 1772 from Virginia. This parcel of land faced the Monongahela River from the entrance of West Run into the river. It extended along the Run on both sides as far as Twenty-second Street in Munhall.

The Fredericks were respected members of the community at that time because it is recorded that he was in charge of road repairs to Saw Mill Run to Fort Pitt. Gwathmey's *Historical Register of Virginia in the Revolution* states that Sebastian, Sr. went to Fort Pitt in 1775 to collect back pay for his service in the Virginia Militia. During the Revolutionary War he served as a "Ranger of the Frontier" and with "Stokely's Rangers" and also with George Rogers Clark's frontier campaigns.

Some records state that he moved on because of scarcity of game. The times were hard here for those very early pioneers. Numerous attacks by the Indians and land disputes between them and colonies of Virginia and Pennsylvania were commonplace. In 1783 the Frederick tract was sur-

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## BETTIS

### Pittsburgh's First Airfield

*Compiled by Jim Hartman*

Every generation has its heroes. The generation of the 1970's dreamed of becoming astronauts when the U.S. landed on the moon in 1969 and has continued to be the dream of quite a few even into the year 2002. Who were the heroes for the generation at the turn of the century? It's hard to believe that one hundred years have passed since the Wright Brothers flew their first aircraft in 1903. In those days aviation was new to the country. WW I brought about the first significant changes in aircraft and after that war the U.S. government had a surplus of these to sell. Young daring men, wishing to fly, bought them and would go from city to city giving displays of aerial acrobatics and rides to those who would be daring enough to go aloft.

There were no airports in those days as we know of today. The pilot would find a nice level spot and land his plane there and crowds would gather to see what was going on. How strange it must have been to be one of the first persons to hear this noise in the skies above their head!



Bettis Field Air Shows Drew Large Crowds  
Photo: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Homestead Park around the year 1910 would have a merchant's picnic with hot air balloon ascents taking passengers aloft. Some of these first airmen would ascend to a

*(Story Continues on Page 3)*

*Serving the Local Communities from the original Mifflin Township: Baldwin(part), Clairton, Dravosburg, Duquesne, Hays, Homestead, Jefferson Hills, Lincoln Place, Munhall, Pleasant Hills, West Elizabeth, West Homestead, West Mifflin, and Whitaker.*

veyed at three hundred twenty-seven and one-half acres. Sebastian Frederick left the area in 1784 and records show that "he conveyed the tract to Matthew Hay." It seems Hay had money problems, so Sheriff David Williamson deeded the tract to Alexander Lowrey. According to Lowrey family records, Alexander Lowrey was a famous Indian trader who had spent time in Kaskaskia, Illinois. By one account he was noted as being a good friend of George Washington. Reportedly Sebastian Frederick Sr. signed the contract in German.

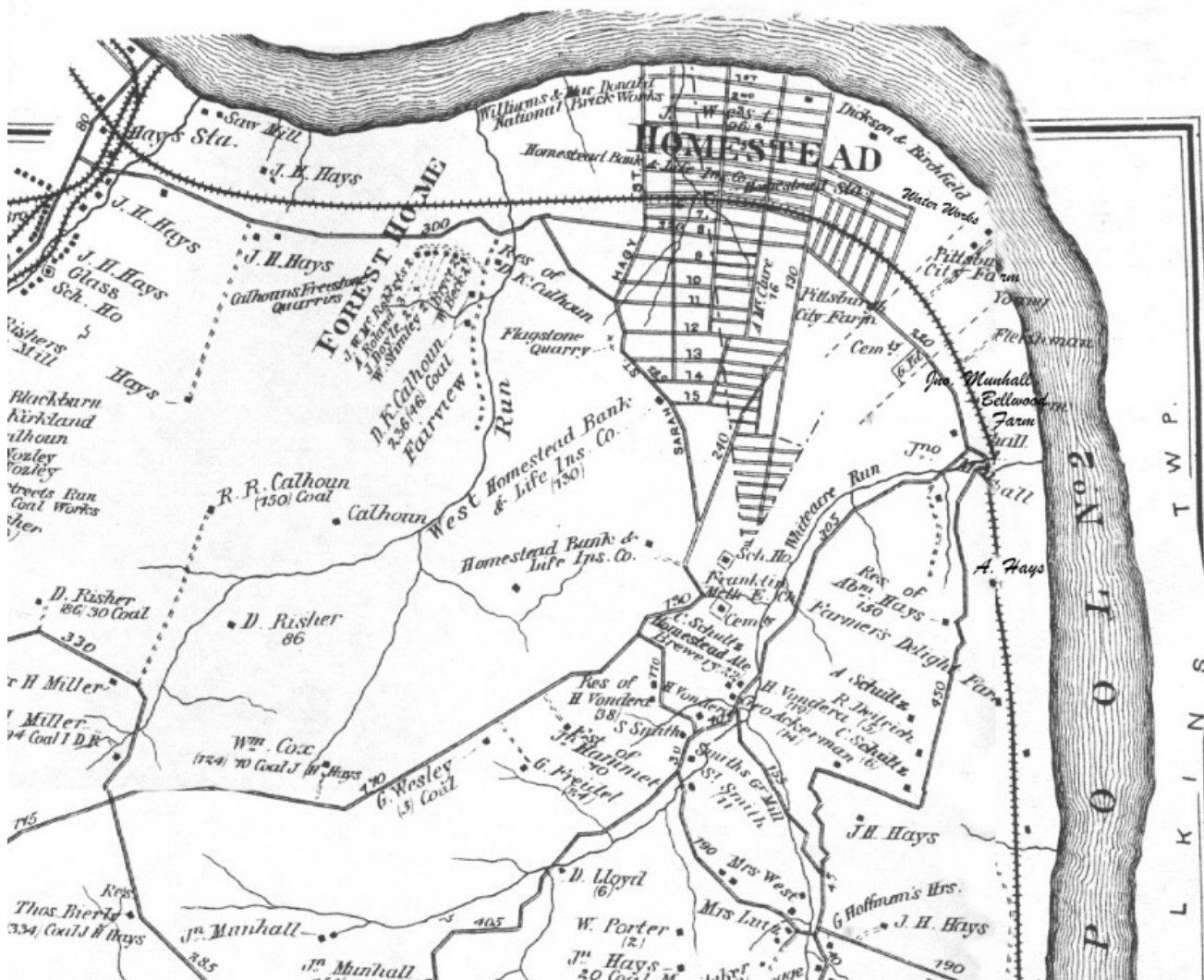
Alexander Lowrey came to Western Pennsylvania from Lancaster County. He and his father operated a pack train in valuable cargoes of salt and operated trading posts in the area. The most notable post was located at Emsworth. Lowrey's Run located there bears his name. There was a trading post located in the "neck" but there is no evidence that it was operated by Lowrey. Colonel Lowrey had a division command at Brandywine during this war and was an army friend of Governor Thomas Mifflin. The name Mifflin Township was probably given through the friendship of Colonel Lowrey for Thomas Mifflin. Lowrey's daughter Mary married John Hays and at his death married John West.

The early names of the Munhall area of Mifflin Township are West, Hays, Whitaker, Calhoun, Cox, McClure, Byerly (Brierly), Bost, Von Der A (Vondera), Risher and Munhall. In those early years the families married into each other. The area prospered as an agricultural and coal mining area in the early 1800's.

The first known school in the Munhall area of Mifflin Township was set up by the pioneers around 1790 to 1800. A one room log structure was built up around the Twenty-Second Avenue area. To the early settlers and the children it was commonly referred to as the Neck School. For many years this was the only schoolhouse in the great bend of the Monongahela River above Pittsburgh. Pupils came from as far away as Beck's Run, Dravosburg and the Lebanon Church areas in search of their education at the small Neck School.

In 1850 Abdiel McClure sold one hundred fifty acres to the City of Pittsburgh for a Poor Farm. In 1879 Andrew Kloman bought a section of property next to the City Poor Farm and erected a steel mill and during this same period Pittsburgh-Bessemer Steel bought property adjacent to Klomans. In 1883 the Carnegie Steel Company bought out and

Continued Page 9...







Lebanon Church Road about 1931 - Bettis Administration Building in center  
Photo Courtesy Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

lofty height and jump from the balloons slowing their descent with crude parachutes.

Elmer Best (now deceased) of Mifflin Township was one of these young men who spent his lifetime around these early area pioneers of aviation. Mr. Best was born in Lincoln Place and his family bought a 32 acre farm on Thompson Run Road and they moved there in 1902. The area around the house was all farmland. Mr. Best stated that he probably saw his first airplane around 1916 when he and another boy were driving cows up Thompson Run Road, "We heard this noise and noise and noise, and the strange thing as I look back on it was we never had enough sense to look up to see the plane until it actually had gone over our heads." The next two airplanes that he saw were in 1920, "My father had a team of horses hauling dirt, building what they called the Carnegie Plan, which are the houses right behind what is now the Great American Federal Savings and Loan on Main Street in Munhall, which at that time was the location of a streetcar barn. A horse pulled a shoe, so we went down to Hays to get the horse's shoe repaired and while we were there two Jennings airplanes went over."

"In the 1920's the first flyers to come around here," Mr. Best stated, "were the Zenith Flyers [these were independent barnstormers – they had two planes, two pilots, and at least one mechanic] and looking back on it, I don't know how they ever took off or landed." The pilots would land on the knob of the hill on a grassy field where the present day Harbison-Walker Company is across from the Bettis Atomic Plant on Pittsburgh-McKeesport Boulevard.

An early Mifflin Township resident, D. Barr Peat lived quite near to the end of this field where those early barnstorming aviators would land. One day a plane landed in this field, the grass was so high that the pilot did not see a tree stump and crashed his plane on landing. Barr Peat saw him crash and rushed over to help him. When he and the pilot

finally got the airplane straightened and repaired he took off. This planted the seed into Barr Peat's mind that there ought to be an airport around here somewhere. The possibility of an airfield in that location was out of the question. The property was owned at that time by a Dr. Nasson, he had a mansion [this mansion still stands directly in front of Park Plaza apartments and faces Pittsburgh-McKeesport Boulevard], and he had no interest in aviation. When Barr Peat looked down from this grassy meadow at the top of the hill he noticed a big beautiful pasture directly below.

Joe Rannigan and Art Wertz were young men living on 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Homestead in the 1920's. Every time an airplane flew over they'd look up and say, "There goes Zip!" They were referring to William T. "Zip" Richmond, who lived on the corner of 15<sup>th</sup> and Hays. "Zip" Richmond owned the first airplane to land at the Pittsburgh-McKeesport Airport. Richmond got the flying bug in 1919. There weren't too many airplanes back then and an airplane landing anywhere caused quite a stir. Zip Richmond caught the "flying bug" from these Zenith Flyers in the area. One day in 1924 "Zip" Richmond came home from the mill and told his wife Florence that he was going to buy an airplane. Mrs. Richmond told "Zip" that "he was out of his mind!"

That summer he ordered a Hiss Standard biplane from the Curtiss factory in New Jersey and asked if it could be flown in. The company recommended a pilot, Romer Weyant, who was for hire. All he needed was a place to land. Richmond, was enterprising, and owned the Richmond Battery Service at 7<sup>th</sup> and McClure in Homestead. He looked into the possibility of setting up a flying field near Kennyswood Park and thought the large crowds there would make giving rides profitable. Reasons are not clear but he was not permitted to do this so he looked elsewhere.

Barr Peat was still interested in establishing an airfield.

*Continues on Page 4*

He and Richmond arranged to have the plane landed on the large pasture that Peat noticed from his home. This property, some 144 acres, was owned by Harry Neel (H.C. Neel) a farmer and well-to-do McKeesport man. Barr Peat contacted Mr. Neel, who was a personal friend, and made a deal to allow Richmond's new plane to land on his property in the summer of 1924 (exact date is unclear.) This began a 25 year span for the flying field. Weyant flew Richmond's aircraft giving rides for a small charge and doing some aerobatics for the thrilled spectators who began to appear. Soon other planes arrived and the site started to look like an airport.

"Chilly" Thomas of Dravosburg a young roustabout on the river barges and John Honus Skelton were the first wing walkers and did some early parachute jumping. Crowds assembled every weekend to the field to take rides and watch all the excitement the early aviators had to show. While the thrills of flying went on, Barr Peat continued working on his dream of an airport.

Clifford Ball, lived on the Ball Farm in Mifflin Township. The Ball Plan in West Mifflin Borough is named for this farm along with the street there. Cliff Ball had an automobile dealership and garage in McKeesport along with his brother Albert's building supply company there. Barr Peat contacted these brothers, who were his close friends, along with Harry Neel and scraped some money up, some \$1,200, to have the field graded. Sam Brendel was also contacted and put a "couple of thousand dollars" into supplying the field with aviation fuel and oil.

The first airshow at this fledgling airfield was promoted in 1925 with the help of Republican congressman Clyde Kelly of McKeesport. The U.S. Army Air Corps brought transports, bombers, and pursuit planes. There was parachute jumping and an air race. Elmer Best stated, "It was on a triangular course, about 15 miles around. One pylon, about 30 feet high, was at the intersection of Homestead-Duquesne Road and Briery Lane." Sightseeing rides and air show thrills were becoming a regular thing for many residents. They could take flying lessons from Bob Trader's flying school (later to become Pittsburgh Institute of Aeronautics) and buy ice cream cones and candy at a refreshment stand. Aviation was catching on in the area at the Pittsburgh-McKeesport Airport, as it was known at that time. Aviators began using the field more and the Airways Tavern was built across from the airport.

On June 19, 1925, with some other small buildings on the field and grading completed, the *Pittsburgh-McKeesport Airport Company* announced the opening of the field to the public. Attending this grand affair was Lt. Cyrus K. Bettis and the Army Air Corps. The airport was managed by D. Barr Peat who welcomed spectators to inspect the facilities. The opening also included the announcement that the field would become the base of operations for air mail service under government contract.

Barr Peat and Cliff Ball were very anxious and willing

to progress. They knew that the business was there. It was up to Cliff Ball to buy the equipment and he was continuously looking for new equipment. When Ball bought airplanes in those days they were "bare-bone" and a lot of other things had to be purchased. They were interested in getting the airmail service started. In 1925 the Kelly Air Mail Act provided that private carriers could bid on airmail contracts. The nation's first contract was awarded to Clifford Ball Airlines. The contract was for the 120 miles between Pittsburgh and Cleveland and the service was scheduled to begin on July 1st of that year. Due to some equipment and financial problems it did not start until 1927. Cliff Ball Airlines did announce a passenger service between Pittsburgh and Cleveland. Fares were \$15 one-way and \$25 round trip for a one hour twenty-minute flight each way.

Pilot Jimmy Clawson and his mechanic Bill Livingston scared everyone on September 9, 1926. That afternoon they were to drop circulars and didn't return. By dinnertime search parties were organizing to look for a downed aircraft. Nothing was found that night. The search continued the next day and was discontinued when the two flyers called from Masontown, PA to say engine trouble forced them to land there the evening before. Jimmy Clawson would die in a plane crash the following August.

Aviation during the Twenties was highlighted by barnstorming and air racing. Lt. Cyrus K. Bettis, of the U.S. Army Air Corps, won the Mitchell Trophy for air racing in 1924 and the Pulitzer Trophy in 1925 with a world record flying speed of 249 miles per hour. He also represented the Army in air shows around the country. On August 12, 1926 Lt. Bettis was en route from Philadelphia to Selfridge Field in Michigan leading a formation of three Army airplanes. Near Bellefonte, PA they encountered a heavy fog and Bettis hit the treetops and crashed into Jack's mountain there. After he regained consciousness, the 33 year old Bettis suffering from a broken leg, broken jaw, gashed forehead and other cuts and bruises, crawled to a road several miles away. He was rescued and taken to Walter Reed Hospital. He seemed to be recovering from his wounds but 14 days later he died when complications set in. To honor this great aviator the airfield was renamed as *Bettis Field* and dedicated on November 14<sup>th</sup> of that year.

December 21, 1926 is an interesting event in our Mifflin Township History. The Standard Propeller Company set up shop on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue in West Homestead. Little did anyone realize at that time that Charles Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* would fly across the ocean with a propeller made in the Steel Valley! Standard Propeller was bought by United Aircraft in 1929, for their license to manufacture a steel propeller with solid alloy blades. In 1931 United Aircraft moved their operations to Connecticut.

Some of the local pilots that Elmer Best was personally acquainted with at Bettis field were Romer Weyant, Dewey Noyes, Curly Lovejoy, Cammy Venay, Ted Taney, Chester



Photo: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania



Roscoe Turner's "Flying Stogie Store"  
 Photo: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Pickup, Harry Smith, Skippy Taylor, Tro Seabreeze, Bob Trader, and Hal Balzley. "It was about this time," Mr. Best recalled, "that Roscoe Turner came to Bettis field with the largest biplane in the world. It was a Sikorsky twin-engined bomber and was sponsored by United Cigar Stores. You would walk into the plane and they had cigars and cigarettes on display. Roscoe was the ultimate in good looks, with his mustache, his tan boots – he was the envy of all the women."

Two of the most monumental events in local history books happened in 1927. On April 21, the first airmail was received and sent out on Cliff Ball Airlines. Ball had purchased 9 biplanes and christened them the *Miss Pittsburgh*, *Miss McKeesport*, and *Miss Youngstown*. At least one of these, the *Miss Pittsburgh* survives today in Rhinebeck, NY. The blue and silver craft, carrying the mail in a front baggage area, flew daily from Pittsburgh to Cleveland with a stop in Youngstown, OH. Joining Curly Lovejoy as the first airmail pilots were Dewey Noyes, Merle Moltrup and Jack Morris.

On August 23, 1927, "Lucky Lindy" landed at Bettis. When Lindbergh returned from Paris he began a goodwill tour of the world in the *Spirit of St. Louis*. The airfield was packed that day. "The streets were lined with people all the way through Lincoln Place" recalled Walt Godleski of West Homestead, when the motorcade headed to a downtown Pittsburgh reception. Up at the airport the *Spirit* was put in a hangar sideways because it would not fit in the largest hangar in the normal way. Ken Scholter, a former Duquesne lad who spent many hours playing hooky at the airfield (and went on to become quite an aviator) remembered that the stipulation for Lindbergh's appearance was the *Spirit* had to be hangared. "We greased some boards and slid the wheels along them into the hangar," recalled Scholter. Col. Lind-



The First Airmail Pilots and their Airplane *Miss Pittsburgh*  
 Photo: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

bergh left at noon the next day as a crowd of 30,000 cheered him.

On May 31, 1928 the National Elimination Balloon Races were held at Bettis field. According to reports more than 150,000 people jammed the field, the largest crowd ever to witness an air event in Pittsburgh. More than 25,000 cars were parked and traffic was backed to Carson Street on the Southside. The 14 entrants, got the weather go-ahead and lifted off at 6 p.m. Within a half hour a thunderstorm brewed and the crowd dispersed. The balloons were caught in the middle and a number of them were struck by lightning and went down. Army balloon No. 3 was hit near Youngwood, PA and Lt. Paul Evert died in the crash. Lt. U.G. Ent parachuted to safety.

Everyone at this time wanted to become an aviation pioneer. There was a mechanic from Bettis who built his own airplane in a barn on Clifford Ball's farm in Mifflin Township. This same barn was also the first building in which a group of young men at that time started the Thompson Run Athletic Club. "This mechanic would work late at nights," recalled Elmer Best, "because when I came home I would see the flashes from his electric welding machine. I don't

know how they got it up to Bettis field, but they got permission to take it through our property. The plane had a German engine, and it took off and had just gained a little altitude when the motor stopped on him. He crashed over to the right of Bettis road, which is now the River-view plan of homes, at that time it was just a cow pasture. Naturally the plane was wrecked, but it was probably the first all metal plane – that is, the wings, instead of being wood, were all metal."

There was a theory back in those days, and it seems ridiculous, that if you were hard of hearing and you took a dive in an airplane it might help. A man with this problem came up to Bettis field one afternoon and wanted to take a dive. Further about this in our *History In The News* articles.

In 1928 Barr Peat and Bo Phelan, another investor in the airport company, sold their original shares they purchased for \$2,000 for \$50,000 each. In 1929 Ball sold his remaining interests to Curtiss-Wright. Cliff Ball Airlines eventually evolved into Pennsylvania Airlines which merged with Central Airlines to become Pennsylvania Central Airlines. PCA became Capital Airlines which in 1962 joined United Airlines.

From 1929 on Bettis field began losing some of its glamour. The depression hit taking away jobs and money and the novelty of airplanes flying was beginning to wear off. Planes were going higher and faster. Wing walking disappeared and aerobatics sent the planes higher making them





Taking off from Bettis Field, one of the most successful early planes the Ford Tri-Motor  
*Photo: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania*

harder to watch. In 1932 Allegheny County Airport opened. At that time it was the largest airport on record. Commercial planes and transports moved there leaving Bettis with the small private planes.

Through the Thirties and Forties Bettis was a commonplace airport compared to its early days. Curtiss-Wright sold the field to Westinghouse in January of 1949. Westinghouse closed the field. Soon after construction began on the atomic power laboratory almost all semblance of an airfield vanished. The two large hangars and administration building remain today as part of the plant. If you drive by on Pittsburgh-McKeesport Boulevard and look through the fence at the buildings, which were the hangars, you will notice wings and propellers in cement-relief images on them.

Something else remains that is dear yet intangible. The memories. Many an old timer will recall that he was at Bettis when Lindy was there or that he went up for his first airplane ride. Bettis field is gone and so are the barnstorming aeronautical gypsies. Today flying is an everyday event, no

more spectacular to the average person than taking a bus. But for many the time when Bettis operated it was the heyday of aviation.

**FOR FURTHER READING...**

*High Frontier: A History of Aeronautics in Pennsylvania* by William F. Trimble, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982.

*The Airways to Everywhere: A History of All American Aviation, 1937-1953* by W. David Lewis and William F. Trimble, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988.

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*Pittsburgh History, A Magazine of the City and Its Region* Winter, 1993/94 by Brian Butko, Paul Roberts, William F. Trimble

*Bettis: The Field That Brought Airmail to Pittsburgh*, by Tony Kambic, The (Clairton) Progress, July 1976

**SPECIAL THANKS TO:** *Barbara Best Starrett of Pleasant Hills & Brian Butko of HSWP for information on this article.*



Panoramic View of Munhall, PA in 2002  
Homestead High Level Bridge is at middle right

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## OUR NEWSLETTER

The Homestead & Mifflin Township Historical Society Newsletter is published monthly by the Society and mailed to paid members.

Members of the Society are encouraged to submit articles concerning the history of their community or personal history stories for publishing in this newsletter by contacting Jim Hartman (412) 600-0229 or by Email to JWHART3@ATTBI.COM.

## OUR QUOTE FOR THE MONTH

Life is a history in volumes three,  
The Past, the Present, and yet to be.  
The FIRST is finished and laid away,  
The SECOND we're reading every day.  
The THIRD and last, Volume Three,  
Is locked from sight, God keeping the key.

*Unknown*

# HISTORY IN THE NEWS

The Daily News – McKeesport  
Friday May 2, 1930

## PILOT AND PASSENGER LEAP TO SAFETY FROM DAMAGED PLANE

ONE SLIGHTLY CUT AND OTHER BRUISED;  
MACHINE IN MILL YARD CRASH

TAKE NOSE DIVE AS HEARING CURE

An airplane pilot and his passenger were forced to use parachutes in leaps to safety late yesterday afternoon when half of a wing of a cabin monoplane in which they were flying was torn off as the ship went into a nose-dive while flying over the Monongahela river near Duquesne. The plane was flying in a special trip for the benefit of the passenger, who requested that a high nose-dive be taken, believing that it would relieve his partial deafness.

The pilot, Chester H. Pickup aged 26, of the Clinton hotel employed as a Curtiss Wright flying instructor at Bettis airport, suffered a slight laceration above the right eye, during a crash of glass in the plane, while the passenger, Allen Dittman, aged 30, of Waynesburg, suffered slight bruises.

Pickup's injury was treated at the McKeesport hospital, after which he was permitted to leave. The damaged plane crashed into the roof of the Duquesne Steel works and was demolished. Pickup landed on the tracks of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad near the Demmler yards, while Dittman dropped to safety in the the yards of the Duquesne Steel company, about 75 feet from where the plane crashed.

News of the plane's fall spread rapidly throughout the district and a few minutes after the crash hundreds of people were enroute to Duquesne, either on foot or in automobiles. Hundreds gathered on nearby hillsides, overlooking the Monongahela river, while others thronged both banks of the river. First reports of the crash were to the effect that the plane together with the passengers, had dropped into the Monongahela river. Another report that gained wide circulation was that Miss Helen Ritchey, daughter of Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. J.B. Ritchey of this city, who took her first flight at Bettis airport on Tuesday afternoon, was the pilot of the plane. This together with other rumors in the effect that the pilot and passenger were killed or drowned, was quickly dispelled as information regarding the crash was given hundreds of people over the telephone by *The Daily News*.

The plane was flying at an altitude of approximately 12,000 feet when a voluntary nose-dive was taken, according to Pilot Pickup who told his story of the accident a few hours later to a reporter of *The Daily News*. The ship with its pilot and passenger left Bettis airport at about 1 o'clock yesterday afternoon and flew over the district until it gained the desired altitude, Pickup said. A plane flying high over Forbes field was seen about 2 p.m. by local people attending the Pittsburgh-Boston baseball game, and it is believed that this was the same ship that crashed.

Dittman came to Bettis airport yesterday afternoon and



Pilot Chester Pickup  
Photo: HSWP

asked that he be taken up in a plane and a sudden nose-dive taken, believing that the terrific air pressure resulting and the quick drop would benefit his hearing. Pickup was selected as the pilot and while Mrs. Dittman waited at the airport, the pair took off in a new type cabin monoplane. Each had a parachute strapped on and Dittman was instructed fully as to its use in the event of an emergency.

While flying more that two miles in the air, pickup said, he quickly threw his ship into a nose-dive, and before it had dropped 3,000 feet the plane had accumulated such terrific speed that the glass in the front of the ship was broken by the force of the air pressure.

The ship's speed increased after the glass was broken and according to Pickup was traveling between 180 and 200 miles an hour when the wing gave way, throwing the plane into a spin. It was then, Pickup said, that he knew there was no chance for a safe landing and ordered Dittman to jump.

The plane was about 4,000 feet above ground at that time, the pilot said. The passenger attempted to open the door of the cabin, but the wind pressure prevented it and he then began to kick out the glass on the side of the plane, after which he crawled through one of the openings and leaped into space. Pickup said that he, too, attempted to open the door of the cabin, but was unable to budge it more than two or three inches and then left the plane through a window. After he came to a safe landing near Demmler, Pickup was taken to the hospital in one of the city's police cars, driven by Officer John Merton.

Dittman, it was said, was but 300 feet above ground when he pulled the rip cord opening the parachute. He landed in the Duquesne mill yard after glancing off the roof of No. 1 open hearth furnace, about 25 feet from where the plane crashed. As he neared the ground, his forehead was bruised on a row of ingot moulds piled on a car in the yard.

The wrecked plane was removed from the roof by a crane and placed on a flat car. A part of the roof was damaged, as the plane landed there with a terrific force. There was no fire.

Pickup, a pilot of some eight years of flying experience, said that it was his first accident, although he has taken many parachute jumps. He was commended highly by officials at Bettis Airport for remaining with the plane until his passenger had gotten out safely. Dittman was taken back to Bettis Airport in an automobile, his hearing unaided by his thrilling experience.

The broken wing of the plane landed, and was splintered, on a field off the Lincoln highway, a few miles west of Greensburg, according to word received here. Autoists stopped their cars to take sections of it as souvenirs.

The plane, which was of the Challenger-Robin type, was damaged to the extent of \$6,000, its total value, H.R. Baxley, general manager of Bettis Airport, said today.



secured all the interests in these mills. The most significant element at that time in the Munhall region's economic growth was the construction and growth of the steel industry mills along the Monongahela River.

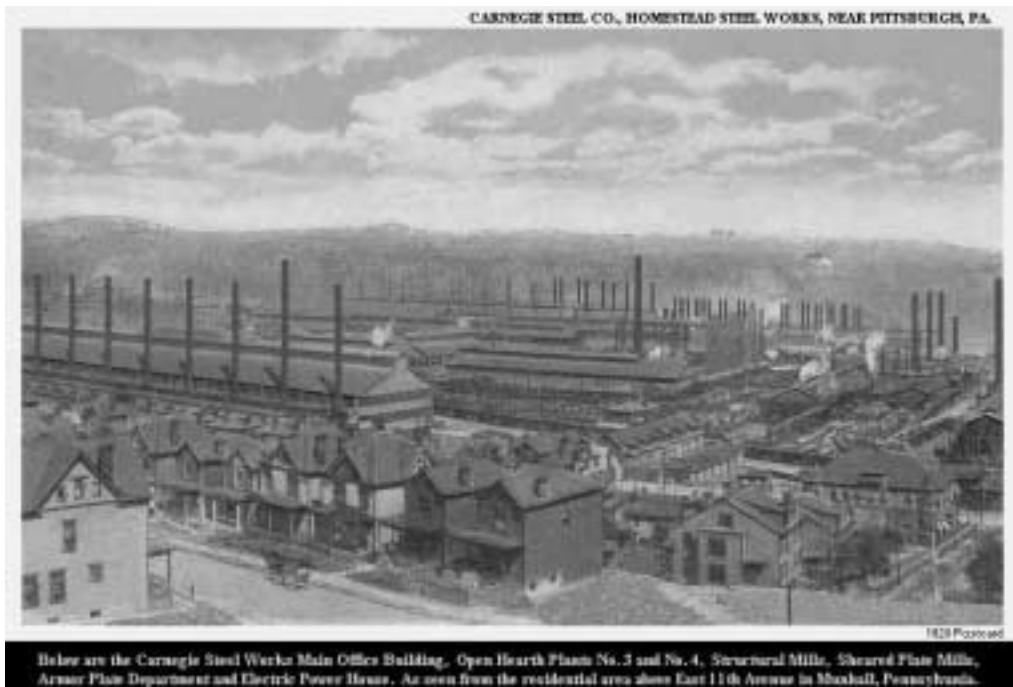
Until 1901, the area was referred to as New Homestead, Harden's Station and the railroad stop was Munhall Station. The area extended up the Monongahela River from City Farm Lane to Ridge Avenue extension on the river and the Whitaker Borough line, and up the Munhall Hollow, formerly called Weitzel's Run, to about Twenty-second Street

A Group of Citizens, living in Mifflin Township and in the area just east and south of the Borough of Homestead, saw a need for banding together. There were problems of urban living in a relatively dense population corner of Mifflin Township at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. At that time communities could petition the county courts for a municipal charter to form a borough government and did not need approval of the Township.

Thus, these interested persons petitioned the Allegheny County Courts for a charter on September 3, 1900 and the charter was granted on June 24, 1901. At that time the population of the area was estimated to be about 300. The original borough charter was for the land east of Homestead and included the area on the south shore of the Monongahela River to about the present cemeteries. To the east were New Homestead, Munhall Station, Carnegie Mill property and Munhall Hollow.

The men selected for Borough Council, first met in the offices of the Carnegie Land Company on Eighth Avenue. Its first members were W.W. Mechling, O.K. McCutcheon, Thomas Watkins, William Cox, Harry Doyle, C.O. Posten and N.A. Whitten. The first secretary was C.E. Alman and the Solicitor was J.M. Wright. A year later a lot on Eighth Avenue at Andrew Street was purchased and a borough building was erected. In 1903 the municipal building opened and housed the offices of the Borough Secretary, the police and fire departments. These facilities were used until the present building at 1900 West Street was opened on August 8, 1945.

The topography of early Munhall consisted of low land rising rapidly from the river. Many small creeks or runs, flowing toward the river from higher ground, had cut deep gullies in Munhall. One such valley followed the course of the West Run along West Run Road. Another hollow is still seen today along the Ravine Creek, Ravine Street. In the 1800's, a third gulch was located along the dividing line between Homestead and Munhall at Margaret Street. The Carnegie Land Company, a subsidiary of the steel mill, filled this hollow with fill scraped from the site of the old Twelfth



Below are the Carnegie Steel Works Main Office Building, Open Hearth Furnace No. 3 and No. 4, Structural Mills, Sheared Plate Mills, Armour Plate Department and Electric Power House. As seen from the residential area above East 11th Avenue in Munhall, Pennsylvania.

Avenue School. The resulting land was divided into lots, leased to mill workers, and houses were built.

In Eastern Munhall, on property actually owned by the Munhall family, a new type of housing was planned. Here, seventy-eight acres of hilly land along Ravine Creek was divided into three hundred plots. Mill workers could lease the land at low costs and buy or build a home for \$400 - \$500 dollars. In addition, John Munhall built a church and office on his property. It was not until 1949 that the Munhall Estate, being dissolved, allowed people living on Ravine Street to buy the land under their homes. The pattern of lease-and-build had lasted that long.

In other parts of Munhall, the Carnegie Land Company built houses and long row-houses for mill workers. Houses were built on Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, Grant, Harrison, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Avenue. Some of the houses on Nineteenth Avenue still stand today.

Regular mill workers couldn't pay the prices. In fact, many of the immigrants who worked in the Carnegie steel mill, could not even afford one of the cheaper row houses. Some men rented sleeping rooms around Sixth Avenue. The boarder lived in this room only for an eight hour period; they just slept there. The rest of his time, he spent on the streets or in the mill. Other workers rented his room for the remaining sixteen hours of the day.

In 1901, Munhall Borough included East Homestead, Munhall Station and the Carnegie Steel Holdings. All of this was known as lower Munhall. There were no stores along Munhall's portion of Eighth Avenue. In a few years, Jake Burechson built a feed store between Dixon Street and Library Place. Later, Carl Colteryahn inaugurated the dairy business when he opened a milk processing plant on Eighth Avenue. In 1901 Munhall's business district was at the junction of Eighth and Ravine Streets. There was Patterson's hardware, Darsie's Dry Goods, a feed store, drug store, and a

*Continued Page 10*



small grocery. Behind the present day Nathan Bilder Lumber Company was the Noroski Slaughterhouse. Every spring, Ravine Creek would overflow its banks and the slaughterhouse would be flooded. Farther away from the river were the mill worker's houses of the Munhall tract. Wooden single dwellings crowded along Ravine Creek. On the sides of the hollow, shingle homes clung and many still stand today. From the river to Sixth Avenue, Carnegie Steel Company occupied Munhall. In the next two blocks were a ballfield, several rowhouses and crowded residences. The ground from Eighth Avenue to Tenth Avenue was almost bare except for a few large superintendent's homes. Three major institutions from Tenth to Sixteenth Avenues were the Superintendent's house (first lived in by C.W. Schwab), the Library and school. Today, the frame school building is a duplex. From Sixteenth to Nineteenth Avenues stretched long row-houses.

Munhall in 1902 was a community still scarred by the great steel strike of 1892. In 1898 the Carnegie Library of Homestead (located in Munhall) was opened to the public. The building occupies the block between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues and between Louise and Margaret Streets. Besides housing a library, the building included a swimming pool, gymnasium, meeting rooms. Bowling alleys, billiard rooms and an auditorium. The bill to Carnegie was \$735,000.00 and in addition he provided a fund for the library. This institution has served the residents of the area well during its past 100 years. It is now listed on the History and Landmarks and has been renovated to its original grandeur.

The original boundaries of Munhall Borough took into account for the Carnegie Land Company holdings including the John Munhall estate, along with the adjacent property of the Pittsburgh City Poor Farm. Munhall was once somewhat isolated from Homestead by a deeply wooded hollow which ran along the eastern side of McClure Street. About 1895 this hollow was finally filled in by the Carnegie Land Company by trimming down and leveling a nearby hill after which the middle of the paved street (McClure Street)

became their dividing line. After 1901 the new Borough of Munhall and established Borough of Homestead assumed complete responsible for their half section's upkeep in costs and maintenance.

Over a period of years the Borough of Munhall has expanded through annexations and added to its land area. The list of annexations which added to the original Borough boundaries were:

- February 2, 1901 – Munhall Gardens
- March 2, 1920 - West Plan, Mifflin Township
- June 29, 1929 - Homestead Park, Mifflin Township

The Carnegie Steel Company became U.S. Steel Company in 1901 and the Homestead Works became world-renowned in steel making. Over the years this facility produced most of the steel fabrication for the first skyscrapers in this country along with specialized armor plating during the two World Wars. Munhall enjoyed a stable community from the 1950's until the mid-1970's when USX Corporation formerly U.S. Steel began cutting production. As the largest employer in the community, the decrease led to a population decline as workers relocated. By 1980 the population decreased to 14,532. The mills closed completely in the mid 1980's and sold the property. The physical structure that had been the major influence of the community was physically dismantled and demolished.

The story of Munhall does not end here. Continental Real Estate purchased the mill property with the idea of developing retail space on the banks of the river. After about 14 years of planning, the *Waterfront* became a reality in the year 2000. This area which was once the site of salt works, brick and glass factories and steel mills is now evolving into a new frontier for the modern pioneers of today as it once was for the early settlers of the area.

Visit our website for more Munhall history at

[WWW.15122.COM/MTHS](http://WWW.15122.COM/MTHS)



# HOMESTEAD & MIFFLIN TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

*DUES ARE FOR CALENDAR YEAR — January through December*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: (        ) \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

BIRTHDATE: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>ACTIVE INDIVIDUAL</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Year \$20.00
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Years \$35.00
<input type="checkbox"/> 3 Years \$50.00

<b>ACTIVE FAMILY</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Year \$25.00
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Years \$45.00
<input type="checkbox"/> 3 Years \$65.00

<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Year \$15.00
<b>SPONSOR</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Year \$50.00

<b>STUDENT</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Year \$12.00

*CONTACT: Jim Hartman (Membership Chair)  
for details (412) 600-0229  
E-MAIL: JWHART3@ATTBI.COM*



<b>CHECK PAYABLE TO:</b> HOMESTEAD & MIFFLIN TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY % Carnegie Library of Homestead 510 E. Tenth Avenue Munhall, PA 15120
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## BECOME A MEMBER TODAY !!!

*You are invited to become a member of the Homestead & Mifflin Township Historical Society.*

The Homestead Historical Society was incorporated as a non-profit corporation in 1980 when Homestead was celebrating its centennial. In the beginning of 2001 the Mifflin Township Historical Society was beginning to organize under the auspices of local resident Jim Hartman. Since the goals of both organizations were to preserve for future generations the local history of the old Mifflin Township area, of which Homestead once was, the organizations joined forces to accomplish this goal.

When you become a member of the Homestead & Mifflin Township Historical Society, you join others who are dedicated to the excitement of lifelong learning. Your support celebrates the vitality of the old Mifflin Township of Allegheny County...a history that not only tells us where we have been, but guides us toward the future. At the present we have three types of membership: Active (Individual & Family), Contributing, Student and Sponsor.

Our **ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP** has Individual and Family rates. Individual is for a single person and Family entitles all members of the same household to participate. This membership entitles you to discounts on multiple year membership, upcoming Society affairs, publications and research facilities (when they become available.) New members introductory pack with information for research. You receive yearly subscription to our newsletter mailed to your home address. You can attend meetings and participate in Society affairs. **ONE VOTE** per membership in society affairs.

**CONTRIBUTING MEMBERSHIP** is offered to those who cannot make the meetings and affairs. There are no discounts on affairs, publications or research. Yearly subscription of newsletter is mailed to your home address. This type of membership has **NO VOTE** in affairs. May attend meetings and participate in committee groups. There are no discounts for multiple years.

**STUDENT MEMBERSHIP** is offered to those in school under 22 years of age. There are no discounts on affairs, publications and research. Yearly subscription of newsletter is mailed to your home address. **NO VOTE** in society affairs. May attend meetings and participate in committee groups.

**SPONSOR MEMBERSHIP** is offered for the business community. This membership has **ONE VOTE** in society affairs. Yearly subscription is mailed to your business address. May attend meetings. One monthly 1/8 page ad in newsletter and name in **MONTHLY NEWSLETTER SPONSOR COLUMN**.





% Carnegie Library of Homestead  
510 E. Tenth Avenue  
Munhall, PA 15120

The Homestead & Mifflin Township Historical Society  
Meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting Place is mentioned in block at right.

Doors open at 6 p.m.

Committees meet at 6:30 p.m. prior to general meeting.

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE @ [WWW.15122.COM/MTHS](http://WWW.15122.COM/MTHS)**

For Information, Contact a Member of the Board of Directors:

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Jim Hartman, Vice President <jwhart3@attbi.com>  
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Jan Carr, Treasurer <jancarr@sgi.net>  
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For membership information, please contact:

Jim Hartman (412) 600-0229

**Scheduled Speakers & Meeting Place  
for the following meetings:  
April 9, 2002  
at West Mifflin High School  
Commonwealth Avenue, West Mifflin, PA**

Andy Quinn - Kennywood Park Corporation  
Will present a slide history presentation of the park.

May 14

Carnegie Library of Homestead

June 11

Carnegie Library of Homestead

July 9

Carnegie Library of Homestead

August 13

Carnegie Library of Homestead

September 10

Carnegie Library of Homestead

October 8

Carnegie Library of Homestead

November 12

Carnegie Library of Homestead

December 10

Carnegie Library of Homestead