



MEMORY  
LQNL  
'2011'  
Memories of Lower  
Pottsgrove





We would like to invite you to write a short story or essay about things you remember from your time living in Lower Pottsgrove. It doesn't have to be long, something about the size of the "Golden Oldies" piece they do sometimes in the Mercury would be great. But it can be longer or shorter, however you would like to do it. It doesn't have to sound professionally written, just anything in your own words sharing with us the memories you may have of life in the area. We thought it would be nice to share these memories with each other, and also make a collection that we could hand down to future generations. Things are so very different now than most of us remember, we thought it would be a good idea to create a collective memory of what life was like in the township during the earlier years that we could preserve for our descendents and the descendents of all the new people who have come to live in our community.

We will display each of these writings here on the website for all of us to read, and if we get enough responses, maybe we could put a booklet together.

Anything you would care to contribute would be greatly appreciated. You can mail your contributions to the Chapel or you can Email them to the website. The addresses are on the "Contact Us" page. We look forward to hearing from you.





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## A Fire at Longview

by BETH SCHERER

You live in Lower Pottsgrove Township and a kitchen fire breaks out in your home. The Sanatoga Fire Company or the Ringing Hill Fire Company responds within minutes of getting the call. Perhaps both fire companies need to respond. Due to a quick response by all the volunteers with the modern day apparatus owned by both companies, your home is saved with little damage. Unfortunately, the same can not be said about The Longview Hotel.

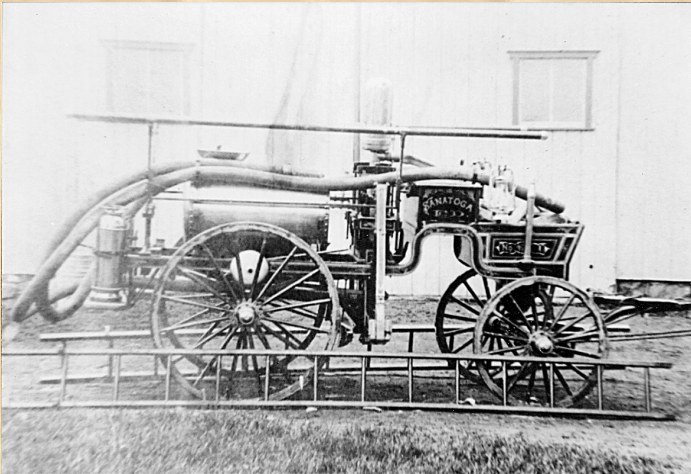
The Longview Hotel? Where is that? Had it survived the destructive fire back in 1905, it might still be down the road from Cutillos at the entrance of Sanatoga Park. The hotel may have been saved had there been an organized fire company in the area closer than the Pottstown company available. So, the need for a township fire company was recognized.

Three years later in January of 1908, what we now know as the Sanatoga Fire Company was incorporated. It was about 32 members strong. As the township grew, it was recognized that there was the need for another fire company. In January of 1956, instead of skating, 23 men met at the Ringing Rocks Park Roller Skating Rink to form The Ringing Hill Fire Company.

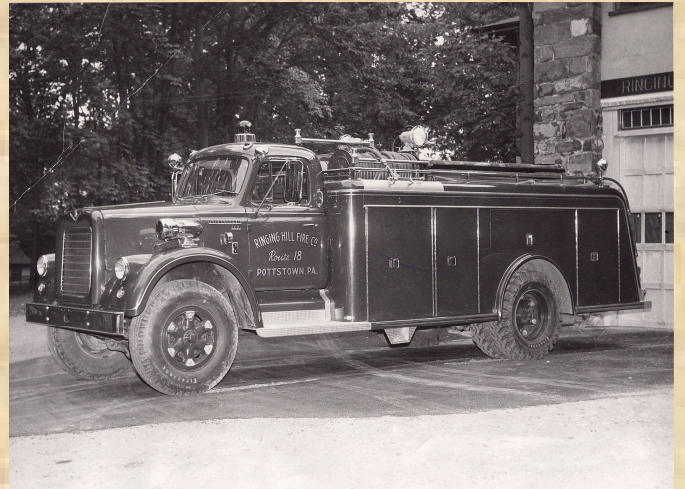


*Today many dedicated volunteers from both the Sanatoga and Ringing Hill Fire Companies are ready to come to your aid if and when needed. As it happens to be, the month of January is a very important time in the history of Lower Pottsgrove Township.*

**50 YEARS LATER**



**Sanatoga Fire Co's first fire fighting apparatus bought in 1908 for \$796.00.**



**Ringing Hill Fire Co's first new fire truck, a 1958 International bought for \$25,000.**

**SUBMITTED JANUARY 28, 2011**





# Dancing With The Stars in Lower Pottsgrove

by BETH SCHERER

Many tuned in for the premiere of the new season of Dancing With The Stars recently. The new cast which includes actors, athletes, talk show hosts, a model survivor, and The Karate Kid all are worth rearranging Monday night schedules to tune in and watch for the next several weeks. No doubt that this hugely popular reality show has brought ballroom dancing back into the spotlight.

Lower Pottsgrove also was a hugely popular place to kick up your heels. Most of us are familiar with the Sunnybrook Ballroom, its big bands and orchestras playing every weekend for crowds from all over to dance to and enjoy. However, Sunnybrook wasn't the only dance hall in town. Both Ringing Rocks Park and Sanatoga Park each provided dance halls for many to strut their stuff.

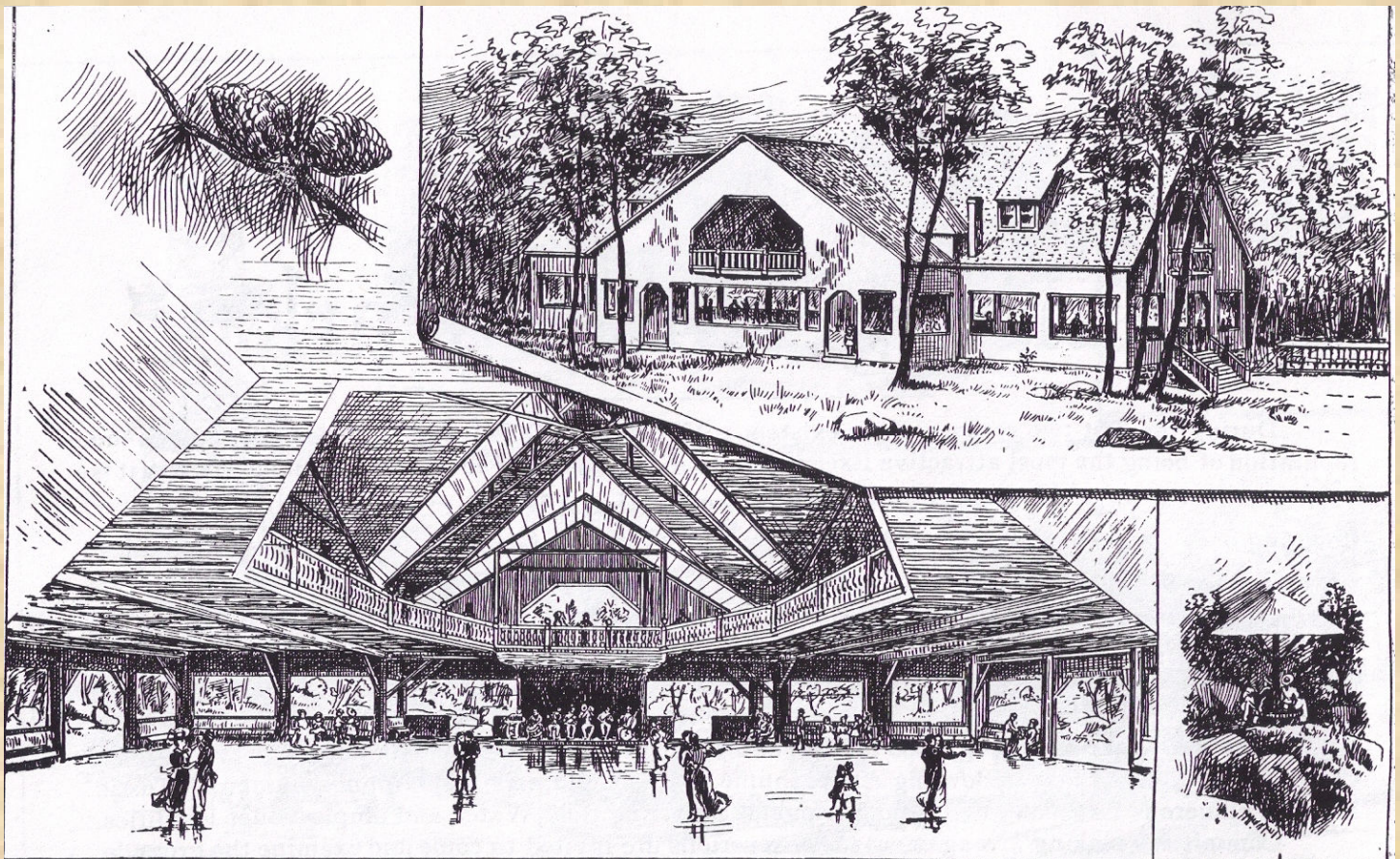
Records dating back to 1896 show there was a Dancing Pavilion in Ringing Rocks park. It was of Queen Anne architecture, had a great, beautiful balcony, and was in the shape of a Maltese cross. It made for one of the most attractive spots in Montgomery County. It is now the Ringing Rocks Roller Rink.



Sanatoga Park also had a large dance hall / pavilion. There were dances every Saturday night during the summer attracting as many as 1,000 people to gather and twirl their way around the dance floor. A quartet played for dancing nightly and Saturday afternoons all summer long.

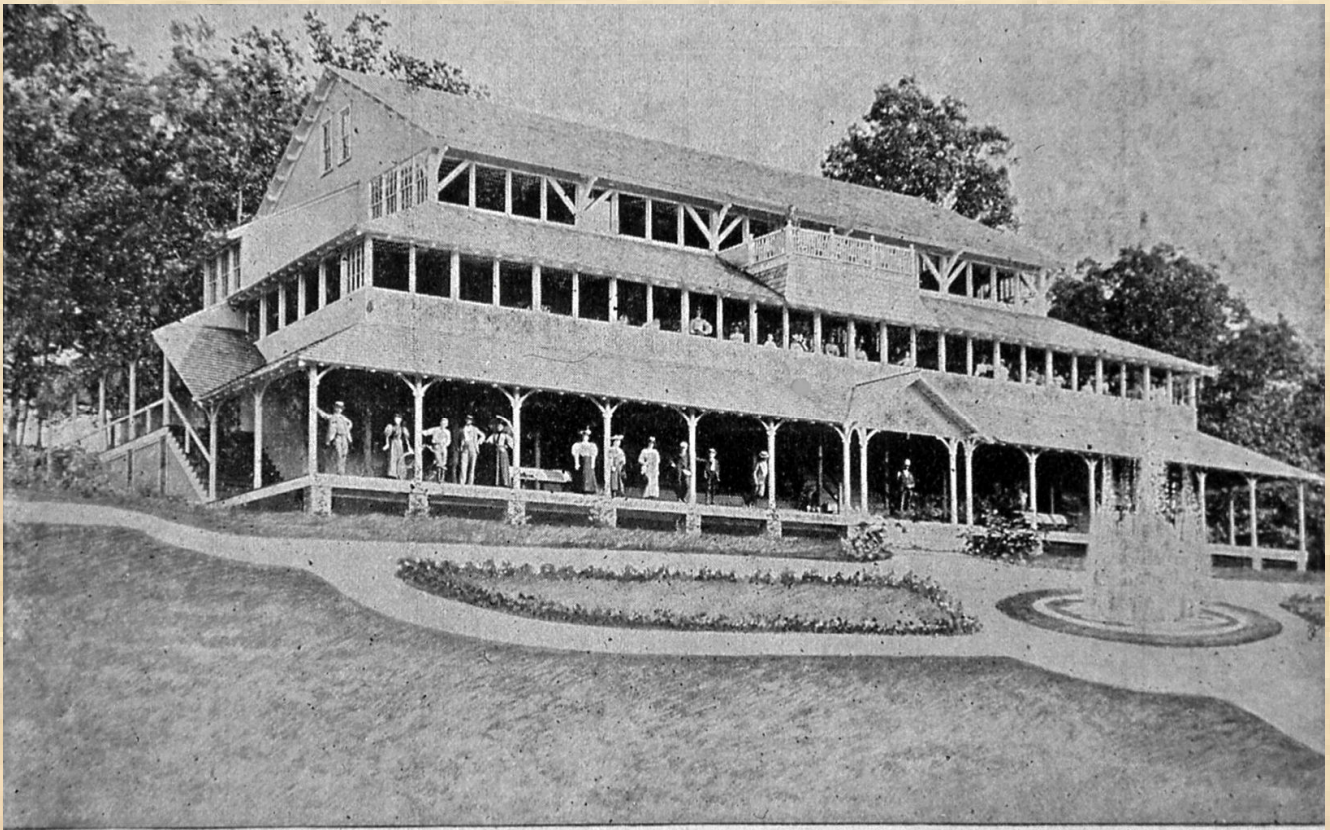
The dance pavilion at Sanatoga Park was the last remaining building on the park grounds after everything else had been torn down. It was turned into a roller rink in the later years and unfortunately was destroyed by fire in 1940.

One can only imagine the night life of Lower Pottsgrove back in the early 1900s!

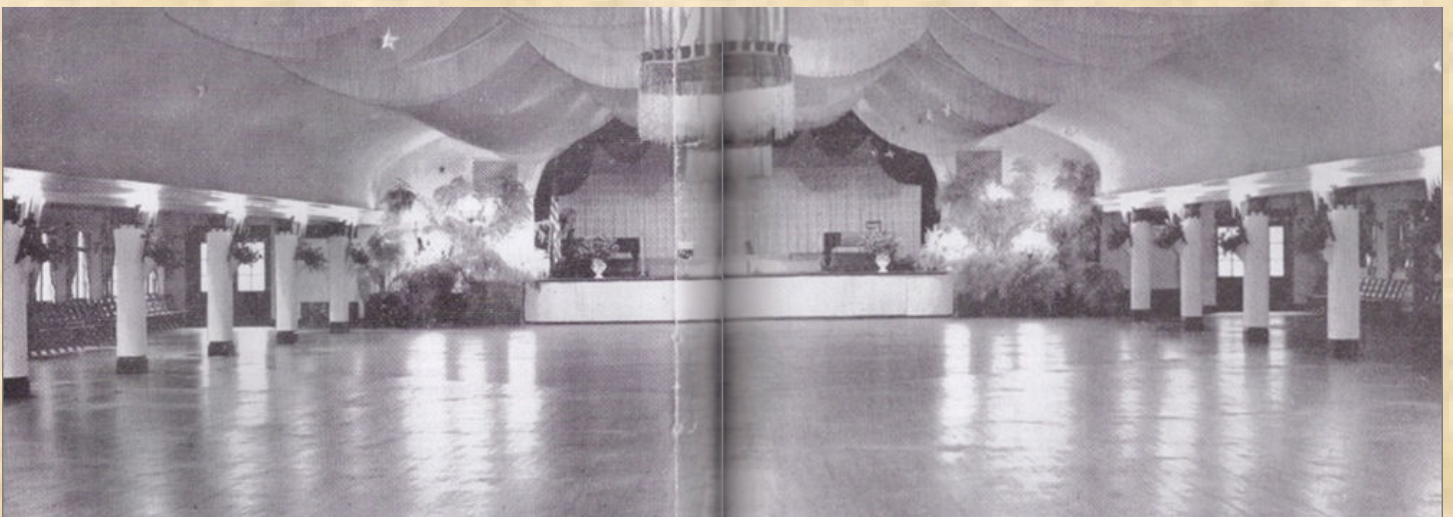


**Interior and Exterior of the Dancing Pavilion at Ringing Rocks Park from an 1896 booklet**





**Auditorium at Sanatoga Park**



**Interior of the Grand Ballroom at Sunnybrook decorated for a Bicentennial Ball in 1952**

SUBMITTED MARCH 21, 2011







# Take Me Out to the Ball Game!

by BETH SCHERER

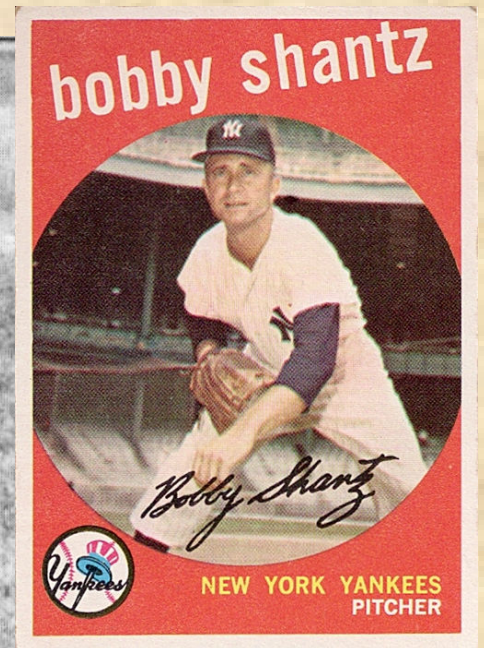
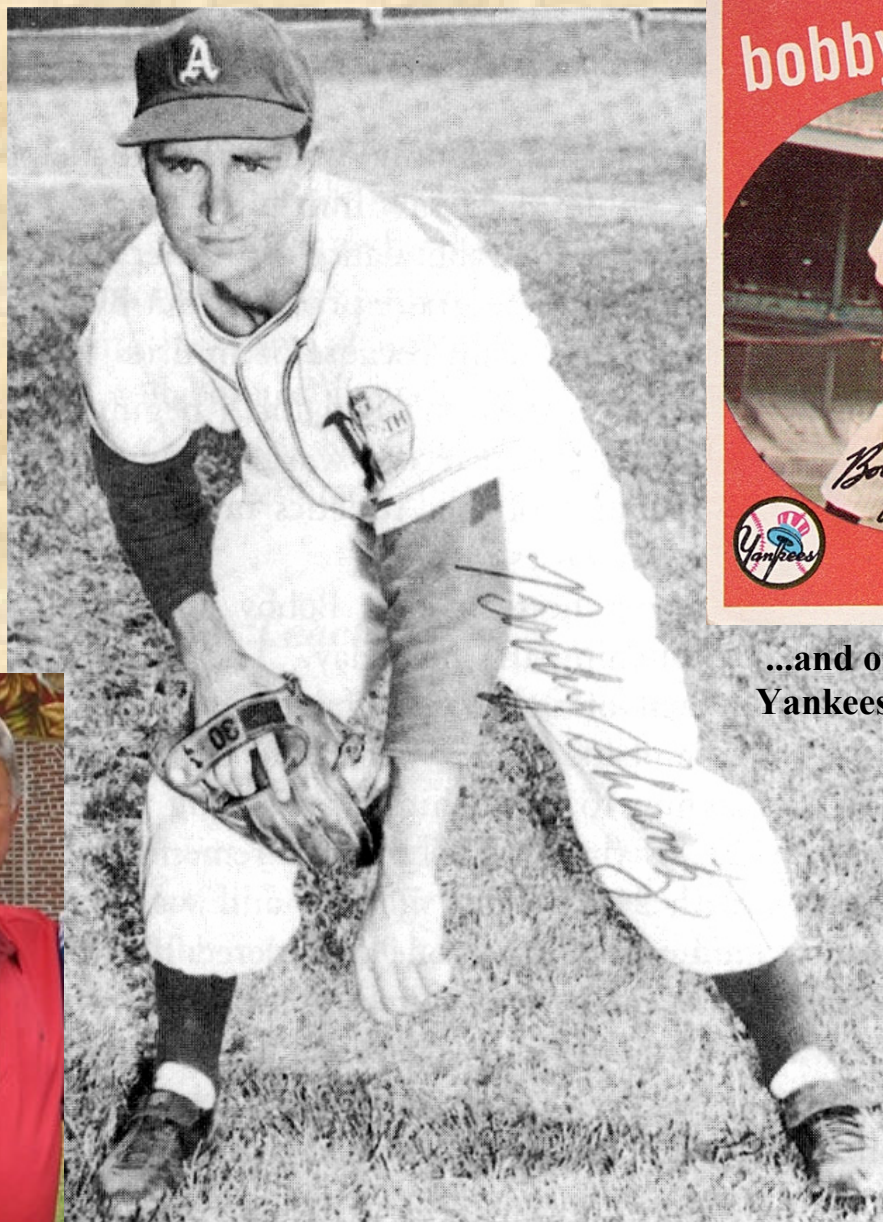
Spring is in the air, flowers are blooming, but more importantly the sights and sounds of baseball are in full swing. After a long winter and an April Fools day snow shower, the wait is finally over to see the Phantastic Phillies and the much anticipated pitching dream team. With all the excitement in the air about baseball this season, it would be remiss of The Lower Pottsgrove Historical Society not to pay homage to Sanatoga's own, Bobby Shantz.

Bobby grew up on Saylor's Avenue in Sanatoga and started his baseball career by playing with the Sanatoga Pee Wees. In 1949 he started pitching with the Philadelphia Athletics. He stayed with Philadelphia until '55 where he moved to the Kansas City team. After pitching for the NY Yankees, Pittsburgh Pirates, Houston Colt .45s and the St. Louis Cardinals, he closed out his career after 16 years back home in Philadelphia.

A few other notable statistics about Bobby are that he was the 1952 American League Most Valuable Player, he played in the '51, '52, and '57 All Star games, and he pitched with the Yankees in three World Series games.

Recognizing his lucrative baseball career, Pottstown High School dedicated and named an athletic field in his honor in 2007.

Bobby Shantz is a true baseball legend in Lower Pottsgrove!



...and on a New York Yankees baseball card



Autographed photo of Bobby

Bobby at 2010 LPHS Strawberry Festival...



SUBMITTED APRIL 10, 2011





## Pomp and Circumstance

by BETH SCHERER

In just a couple of weeks the Pottsgrove Senior High School Class of 2011 will be heading onto a stage to receive their diplomas.. Most of these graduates will be ending a 13-year stay with the Pottsgrove Schools. They started at Lower Pottsgrove , West Pottsgrove, or Ringing Rocks Elementary school, joined together at the Intermediate School , and spent the last four years at the High School. Not too long ago these schools didn't even exist.

Once there were five one-room school houses in the area now known as Lower Pottsgrove Township. Most of the historical data documenting the Pottsgrove schools is from the latter part of the 1800s but some of these schools were in session for many years prior to this. As the population expanded, two more schools were added. These one-room school houses only provided education through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Until September, 1955 Lower Pottsgrove students attended Pottstown High School for their secondary education. It was this year that Upper, Lower, and West Pottsgrove were in the process of joining together to become

Pottsgrove School District. Initially the 7<sup>th</sup> graders went to West Pottsgrove High School which is now the elementary school. Pottsgrove Senior High School located on Kauffman Rd. opened its doors in September of 1958. The following Spring the first commencement ceremony was held at the high school. 55 years later, the Class of 2011 will be receiving their diplomas on the same grounds.

Hail Pottsgrove High School and congratulations to the Class of 2011!

# Class of 1907

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## Third Annual Commencement

OF THE

### Lower Pottsgrove Public Schools

#### In Sanatoga Chapel

SANATOGA, PA.

On Friday Evening, May 31st, 1907

AT EIGHT O'CLOCK

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#### PROGRAM

Prayer,	-	-	-	-	REV. HENRY ALFKE
Salutatory,	-	-	-	-	FRANK D. WAGNER
Music,	-	-	-	-	ORCHESTRA
Oration,	-	-	-	-	NEWTON K. SAVAGE
Class History,	-	-	-	-	SALLIE E. KUMMERER
Music,	-	-	-	-	ORCHESTRA
Valedictory,	-	-	-	-	CHARLES S. SCHEFFEY
Presentation of Diplomas,	-	-	-	-	REV. HENRY ALFKE
Music,	-	-	-	-	ORCHESTRA
Address to Graduates,	-	-	-	-	DR. A. C. ROTHERMEL
Benediction,	-	-	-	-	REV. HENRY ALFKE

Commencement Announcement from 1907

SUBMITTED MAY 22, 2011







## Vacation Time!

by BETH SCHERER

School is out and it's summertime! Time to pack up the SUV and head down to the shore or up to the Poconos. Maybe you are just having a 'staycation' in Lower Pottsgrove with some out of town visitors. At one time those out of town visitors had their choice of at least four hotels to stay at in Lower Pottsgrove.



Philadelphia to Pittsburgh.

The Crooked Hill Tavern, later known as The Sanatoga Inn and Cutillo's Restaurant, opened about 1770 by the Bosserts. It was a favorite stopping place for large six-horse and mule teams on the route from

The Ringing Hill Hotel was located on what we now know as Orlando Road known then as "Swamp Road". It was known in the late 1800s as a "good specimen of the country tavern."



The Pleasant View Hotel was located on the northwest corner of E. High Street and Pleasantview Rd. It was a private residence up until the late 1800s when David Ganger opened it as a hotel. It became a

regular meeting place for the Lower Pottsgrove School Board. You may also remember that this building housed the Sanatoga Post office in it's last years before being torn down so the now vacated Rite Aid Pharmacy could be built.



The last hotel in the area was the Long View which sat at the bottom of Sanatoga Park. This resort hotel was owned by Civil War Heroine Annie



Wittenmyer, a Sanatoga resident. The hotel was filled to capacity during the summer months. As we know from a previous article, it was destroyed by fire in 1905.

Watch for upcoming articles which will give more detail on each of these hotels that many came to stay at so many years ago.

SUBMITTED JUNE 26, 2011







## "The Old Swimming Hole"

by CAROL ISETT

We have come to those lazy, hazy days of summer when everyone's mind turns to ways to cool off. Back in the days before air conditioning and backyard pools, the next best thing was the old swimming hole. Lower Pottsgrove had no shortage of good places for swimming and water activities.

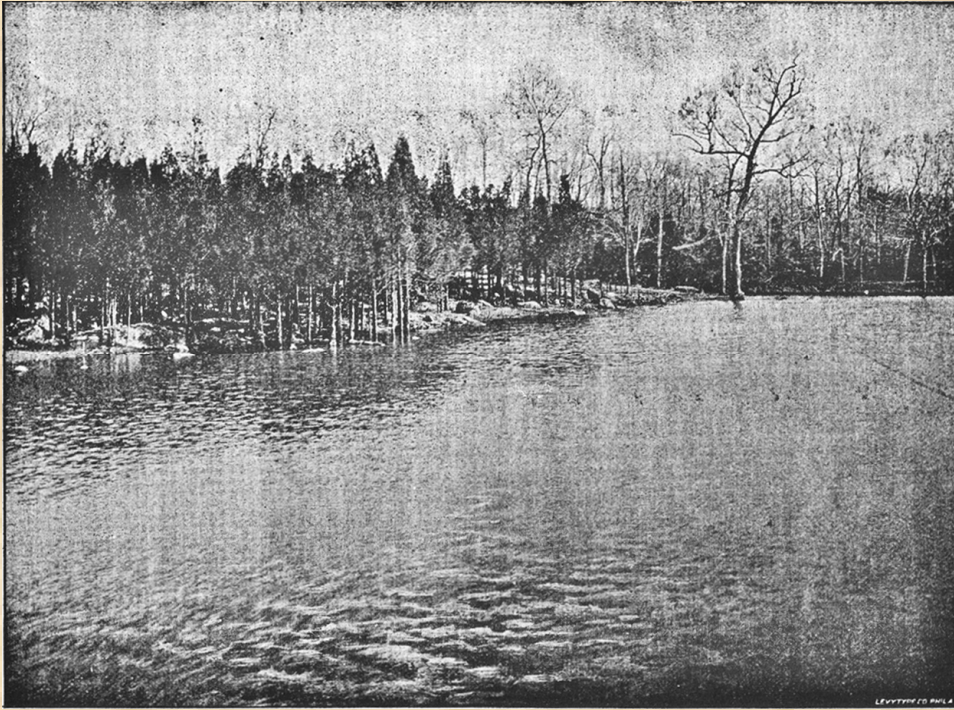
First was the lake at Sanatoga Park. A swimming area was installed with diving boards, sliding boards, and other water amusement devices. The bottom of the pool was covered in sand and gravel in order to make it a comfort to



bathe in this cool and exhilarating body of water. Bath houses were built, bathing suits could be rented, and there were also boats and canoes for rental by the hour.



Then there was Lake Minnetoga at Ringing Rocks Park, which covered two



acres and was said to be a beautiful body of water reflecting the bordering trees in its limpid depths. Fed by spring water, this was a choice spot for swimming in years past. There were also pleasure boats for the visitor who cared to row over the crystal waters.

Another great place to cool off was Pruss Hill Dam located at Pruss Hill Road and Schaffer Road. Pruss Hill Dam had long been famous for being the coldest spot in the area during the winter, so what else would be better than to take a cool dip in the refreshing waters. There was a bath house for changing, and Miss Elsie Liss, daughter of G. E. Liss, owner and proprietor of the Pruss Hill Ice Co., taught local children how to swim there.







*There was one more spot which would fit the category of "old swimming hole" to a "T". This was Reese's Dam down almost at the end of Sanatoga Creek where it empties into the Schuylkill River. There was the*

*proverbial rope tied to a tree that swung out over the water, and a few brave swimmers actually dived off the high stone wall, which is now crumbling and unsafe to be near, into the cool waters below.*

*Even though home air conditioning was not much more than the seed of an idea in someone's mind at that time, there were some great ways to cool off in the early days of Lower Pottsgrove Twp.*

SUBMITTED JULY 13, 2011





# Killtop Drive In

by BETH SCHERER

I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream! Although summer is winding down, some would agree that ice cream tastes oh so good any time of the year, especially soft serve ice cream. An excellent place for that soft serve vanilla, chocolate, or vanilla & chocolate swirl ice cream craving is right on the East end of Sanatoga in Lower Pottsgrove Township. If you're heading to or from the Sanatoga exit off of 422 and your travels take you onto East High Street, you've passed that 1950s looking restaurant known as Killtop Drive In.

Killtop opened in the summer of 1952 as a Carvel Ice Cream Franchise. Several years later in 1958, the Carvel Ice Cream name changed over to Killtop Drive In and more than just ice cream was being served. Once the new name was in place, the ice cream cone on top of the building was taken down. The Bucci family out of Birdsboro were one of the original owners of Killtop. In the early 1960s the Tobias family partnered with the Buccis in ownership. The cone was re-built and still stands on the roof today due to some winnings at the horse races.

The Albitz family took over ownership of the restaurant on April 1, 1984. Ron and his wife Wendy continue to serve burgers, fried chicken, and that soft serve ice cream today. Just remember they're closed on Tuesdays!



*Joe Zlomek, editor of the Sanatoga Post, had this interesting information to add. Hilltop's food rated a five-star review earlier this year on Yelp, the social networking platform for dining and entertainment. "I LOVE this place! My family and I have been going there for years," a Phoenixville reviewer wrote.*

*Eighty-four percent of voters on Urbanspoon Philadelphia, a restaurant online rating guide, gave Hilltop a thumbs-up. Two independent bloggers also have given it raves.*



**Hilltop Drive In "then"...**



**...and "now"**



SUBMITTED SEPT. 5, 2011

XX



# History of the Historical Society

by BETH SCHERER

Pottstown Memorial Medical Center, Sunnybrook, CVS, Thriftway, KMart, Sanatoga Fire Company, The Silver Shoppe, Cutillos, Sanatoga Animal Hospital, Sanatoga Corporation, Hill Top, Turkey Hill, a couple of shopping centers, numerous doctor offices & other small businesses sit along the Lower Pottsgrove Township stretch of East High Street. Among all of these business buildings, some just built within the last decade, sits a quaint, little brick chapel with a trolley in the backyard. Ok, so its not a real trolley, but it is a building that looks like a trolley. If you don't already know, this chapel is the old Sanatoga Union Sunday School which now is headquarters for The Lower Pottsgrove Historical Society.

The building itself dates back to 1891 but LPKS didn't obtain the deed until 100 years later in 1991. The Society was originally founded in 1985. Restoration of the chapel is a main goal of LPKS. Located inside the chapel are many items depicting the vast history of Lower Pottsgrove Township. It truly is a museum located in the heart of Sanatoga and the township. The Lower Pottsgrove Historical Society is preserving the heritage of Lower Pottsgrove Township.





As with most non-profit organizations, LPKS depends on its membership fees and holds fundraisers to simply pay the bills. Yard Sales, Strawberry Festivals, Raffles, and your donations throughout the years have kept this Society afloat. Not to mention all the time and energy its members have given and continue to give. At the end of this month a new event will be added - Octoberfest Membership Drive. LPKS is trying to grow and invites you to visit that little brick building located at 2341 E. High St. on Sunday, 10/30/2011 from 1 - 4 pm. More information can be found on the website: [www.lowerpottsgrovehistoricalociety.org](http://www.lowerpottsgrovehistoricalociety.org).

Oh, and if you were ever curious as to why there is a building in the backyard that looks like a trolley, well, you'll just have to come by and find out for yourself.



SUBMITTED OCT. 14, 2011

XXII





# Remembering Sanatoga Speedway

by GLENN ISETT

It's November and we have already had a mini-blizzard and the temperature is inching toward freezing, but in NASCAR the points race is really heating up. Sixty years ago the championship had already been decided on Oct. 28. That's when the final 200 lap race was held at the Sanatoga Speedway. Jimmy Ryan was points champion, Mose Moore was second and Monk Keller was third.





Sanatoga Speedway was built in 1937 by Ed Moll, John Sweetwood, and Nick Pelacotti. It was a 1/5 mile flat asphalt track and remained that size until it's untimely demise. It was primarily a midget track until 1941 and then closed during WWII. With the end of WWII the racetrack obtained new ownership and new showmanship in the person of George Marshman. In the 1948 season he began racing "stockcars". This was roughly a year before NASCAR held it's first race in mid-1949. The stock cars of Sanatoga were unlike the racers of today. They were primarily windowless, fenderless 1930-1940 Ford coupes, with an occasional Chevy or Dodge, and what was known then as a two door sedan thrown in. Most had flat head Ford V8 engines and three speed on the floor transmissions.

By 1951 the season ran from April to October and included 47 meets. This was possible because in many weeks there were two meets, and on Memorial Day, there was an afternoon and night program. To add to this grueling schedule was the format of the program itself. Depending on the number of entrants there would be heat races of 8 to 10 laps. If you finished in perhaps the top 10, you qualified for a semi-final. Then there were usually two semi-finals made up of the heat qualifiers. Again, there were a number of qualifiers for the feature race of usually 25 laps. But wait, there was one more chance to get into the feature event. All non-qualifiers could race in the Consolation Race and usually the top 2 would qualify for the feature race. You could possibly run in 4 races in one meet. Just to show the tenacity of a champion, on May 30, 1951, Jimmy Ryan won the afternoon feature and finished third in the night feature.

I mentioned new ownership and showmanship. George Marshman was a showman. In 1954, he hosted a Demolition Derby that featured a Sherman tank, and it was always a thrill to see a car go through the wooden back fence only to have it come crashing back through further down the backstretch. Long after he had left the business, George finally admitted that the fence crashing was staged. The fence was very loosely constructed near the beginning and the end of the backstretch. There was a rudimentary road for the driver to follow, and there was a spotter near the entrance to the third turn to wave him back through to the track when it was all clear.

In 1958, placards started appearing heralding the arrival of the fastest drag strip in the area. Land was cleared in preparation, but suddenly it all ended. This writer knows of no explanation for the end, but end it did, and a once bustling, noisy, thriving attraction that drew thousands weekly was silenced. Mother Nature has slowly taken back what was originally hers, except for a few random patches of asphalt that can be found among the weeds and high grass; and the old racing aficionados will tell you with a note of pride and a hint of misty-eyed melancholy that "this is where the fourth turn was".



SUBMITTED NOV. 11, 2011



XXV

Going into 4th turn looking at Grandstand





# Sanatoga Corporation

by BETH SCHERER



Did Santa bring you everything you asked for this holiday season? The holiday hustle and bustle may have come and gone for another year, but now's the time to cash in on some great after Christmas and year-end deals. It's time to treat yourself to that new oven you wished you had while baking cookies, or perhaps you're in need of a new HD, flat screen TV before your Super Bowl Party next month. You can find these items plus so much more at a local, family run appliance store right in Lower Pottsgrove Township. Sanatoga Corporation has been serving the Lower Pottsgrove community for over 80 years and continues to offer impeccable customer service.

Oliver Wittenmyer born as Oliver Doner was the founder of what is now Sanatoga Corporation. Oliver grew up in Sanatoga and started the Sanatoga Radio Company in 1925 by traveling to New York City to purchase radio parts. He assembled the radios and sold them door to door. Oliver expanded his product line to include home appliances and eventually radio sales were discontinued. Sanatoga Radio Company had become a full service appliance store and in the early 1960s the name of the store was changed to Sanatoga Corporation.

#### **Under Recent Renovation**

In 1970, Charles Wittenmyer bought the business from his father and remains the current owner of Sanatoga Corporation. The store and showroom are still in the



original location at 2783 East High Street in Sanatoga, of course. Charles' kids, Bryan, Karen, and Connie are all involved in the business along with a long-time, loyal staff. They're ready to talk TVs and appliances with you!





Charles Wittenmyer recently was a guest speaker at the Lower Pottsgrove Historical Society. He is a distant relative of Annie Wittenmyer, civil war heroine and Sanatoga native. Charlie spoke of Annie's many contributions to the Lower Pottsgrove community and much more. He even talked about some history of appliances and how his father, Oliver, contributed to some of that history. If you get a chance to talk to Charlie, his stories are worth asking about!

LPHS greatly appreciates and thanks Charlie and his family for the recent contribution of a new flat screen TV and outdoor lighting at the Chapel. The TV will be kept in the Chapel and will be used for Lower Pottsgrove history slide presentations. The outdoor lighting will be a great addition to the ongoing improvements at the Chapel.

SUBMITTED DEC. 27, 2011

