



# Preserving One Community's Stories: The Robinson Twp. Historical Society

**I**n 1997 Dick Story of Robinson Township undertook a mission that would result in a 200+ page hardbound book that preserves much of the township's history and its people. He spent two years laboring over the collection of its contents. Story gathered information from local residents. He collected photos and artifacts. He researched information, followed up on leads, and spoke to anyone and everyone who had a story to tell about the township's past.

In the end, Story's "story" – the history book – became the cornerstone of the township's Bicentennial celebration in 2001. The bicentennial gave the Robinson Township Historical Society an opportunity to showcase the community's past. Story is president of the society, a role he assumed four years ago.

A lifelong resident of Robinson, Story reflects on how his family, particularly his father, Harry Story, was a strong influence to him as he grew up.

"My father's involvement in the community, and his knowledge of our area, left an impression on me," Story reflects.

That impression played a factor in his decision to preserve local history through written descriptions, photographs, and artifacts.

While the history book is a compilation of the community's families, its buildings, organizations, and infrastructure, the Robinson Township Historical Society is a living testament to preserving an era of the past for generations to come.

The society was formed in 1988 at the suggestion of the Robinson Township commissioners. Millie Stinner was its first president. Tony Petrovic, who eventually became the second president, had already been saving bits and pieces of the township's past in his garage.

When the township opened its new municipal offices on Church Hill Road on May 4, 1991, a number of items from Petrovic's garage were moved to the new building to form the



Members of the Robinson Township Historical Society, seated, left to right: Alberta Schotting, Olive Harvey, and Helen Arch; standing: Dick Story, Merlyn Deyak, Edward Schotting, and Steve Arch.

basis of what has become an enormous collection of more than 2,800 items housed in two rooms.

The society maintains the space where visitors can visit every Tuesday and Thursday from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. There are toys from the turn of the century, swords used in war, pictures from dozens of families, skates, jewelry, and miniature building replicas. Mining picks, drills, stompers, carbide, coal, and red dog are also on display.

An old school desk with an inkwell is also among the artifacts.

Story said that the society also has compiled a computer list of graves in six of the community's cemeteries.

The hallway leading to the museum is lined with photos of old schoolhouses, fire fighting squads from the early 1900's, and old buildings that either no longer exist or have been modified from their original use.

"We're really proud of how far along this society has come since it was started," Story notes.

"There is a lot of time invested into preserving the past. We want more people to get involved."

Currently, about a dozen residents are involved in the effort. Two of them live in area nursing homes. Story keeps them involved by arranging to bring them to outings and the society's meetings.

Anyone with a desire to help the society continue to preserve the township's history is invited to attend the monthly meetings. They're held the first Monday of each month at the township building, beginning at 1 p.m.

Contact Story at 412-264-2733.

TOP: The former home of Dr. John W. Burkett.  
RIGHT: The old Malarky Service Station on Steubenville Pike.





ABOVE: The old #7 School, built in 1892.

## Excerpts from the Robinson Twp. Historical Society History Book

### “Ancestors’ Lifestyle in Moon, Fayette and then Robinson Townships”

Prelude: Allegheny County was erected in 1788 from portions of Washington and Westmoreland Counties. At first, it stretched to Lake Erie and was divided into seven townships: Pitt, Plum, Versailles, Elizabeth, Mifflin, St. Clair, and Moon. The county was reduced to its approximate present size in 1800. By that time, the number of townships had increased to ten: Deer and Pine townships had been erected from a portion of Pitt Township and Fayette Township from a portion of Moon Township in 1796. Two hundred years later, in 1988, Allegheny County is comprised of 130 separate communities, including cities, boroughs, townships, and home rule municipalities.

In 1609, James II of England made Southwest Pennsylvania part of the Virginia Territory. In 1681, Charles II gave Southwest Pennsylvania to William Penn. In 1723, southwestern Pennsylvania was forest, the hunting grounds of six tribes of Indians, namely Cherokee, Shawnee, Miami, Chippewa, Delaware, and Iroquois. No white men lived in this wilderness. A few adventurous trappers and hunters traveled beyond the Allegheny Mountains and on their return told their friends of the unbroken forests and rich lands to the west. Hearing these glowing accounts, others set out to settle these lands. They were courageous, hardy and hopeful of finding the land of their dreams.

In 1748, the Ohio Land Co. was created in hopes of establishing settlements in the area south of the Ohio River. Many of the best lands along the Chartiers and Montour Creeks were Virginia land grants given before 1779. In 1752, a treaty was made with the Indians at Logstown (Beaver) and people were urged to settle here. People came from Virginia and their slaves gave up a comfortable life and only found wilderness. Some of the people returned to Virginia but most stayed. Most of those who did were Scotch-Irish, who wanted to get away from taxes paid to England and the Anglican Church. The English encouraged the Germans to come to Pennsylvania and made them many promises.

At the same time, the Penn family encouraged settlers to go west. They encouraged men to develop a colony of independent landowners of small farms. They advertised in Europe stressing the opportunity for a poor man to own his

farm. Pennsylvania became the haven of the oppressed and homeless of all nations. One can easily understand how the same portion of land was given to different people. Sometimes the rights were resold before the people arrived. Deeds were not recorded, payments not made, and much property was obtained by squatters rights or blazed out by tomahawk claims.

In 1773, a man could blaze a tree, drive an initialed stake into the tree and claim the acreage so marked. The reason for this confusion of property rights was that there was no judicial handling of records. In 1750, this territory was part of Cumberland County with the county seat at Shippensburg (east of Chambersburg) and the next move was in 1771 when this area was part of Bedford County, with the county seat at the present Bedford. In 1773, the county seat was at Hannastown (near Greensburg) when this area was Westmoreland County. All of these county seats were too far away to handle judicial matters. With Pennsylvania and Virginia both claiming jurisdiction over the territory, more disregard for the law existed.

The French wanted to control this same territory to establish convenient settlements for stopovers on their travel from Canada to New Orleans. They settled the land, which steadily pushed the frontier inland from the eastern seaboard. They cut down the forests upon which the Indians’ food supply and their way of life depended. The Indians often paid little attention to treaty boundaries. The position of the agent or interpreter who stood between the Indian and the white settlers was both important and hazardous. Long and bitter contests

began for control of this vital strategic gateway to the west. Fort Pitt was established in 1760 upon the recommendation of many, including George Washington. The French and Indian War was fought from 1770 to 1772 over this area. Fort Pitt changed hands several times.

Madame Catherine Montour was an interpreter of French-Canadian and Indian ancestry. She was a person of distinction and influence in Indian affairs in New York and Pennsylvania. Her son, Andrew, was honored as a Chief of the Senecas, and also achieved the rank of Major in the British army. In 1769 a grateful colonial government granted him a tract of 300 acres situated on the south side of the Ohio River which encompassed much of the present boundaries of the Montour School District.

Andrew Montour died around 1772. He is believed to have been buried on an island known as Montour Island, now Davis Island. Davis Island was a wooded island lying in the back channel of the Ohio River and overlooking the present site of the school system. Montour was truly a remarkable man. Aside from the School District, several other items throughout Pennsylvania carry his name. As noted in the journals and diaries of the 18th century, all the traders, scouts, missionaries, Indians, and governments of the day knew Andrew Montour. As an interpreter, he traveled with the armies of British Generals Braddock and Forbes and also worked with George Washington at Fort Necessity.

Excerpted from the Robinson Township Bicentennial Book. Complete copies of the book can be purchased for \$25 by calling 412/264-2733.