

**UPPER ST. CLAIR TODAY** presents the remaining pages of *Upper St. Clair As It Was*, a 40-page documentary by Margaret Gilfillan. With expressed permission from the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair to reprint, the book concludes with a short biography of Margaret Boyd Gilfillan.

We hope you have enjoyed this three-part series presentation of the book, which tells of our Township's early history through the eyes of Margaret Gilfillan.

For the book's introduction and 19 previous pages, see pages 94–95 of **TODAY's** winter 2019 edition and pages 90–93 of **TODAY's** spring 2020 edition. To view **TODAY's** past online editions where this text can also be found, visit [twpusc.org/usctoday](http://twpusc.org/usctoday).



**Upper St. Clair As It Was** (continued)  
A DOCUMENTARY  
By MARGARET B. GILFILLAN  
Presented by  
The Historical Society of Upper St. Clair

Cont. from page 93 of the spring 2020 edition of **TODAY**

### SCHOOLS

The first exact information on the schools comes from "Vol. 2, Minutes of the Board of School Directors for Upper St. Clair Township" which begins on March 29, 1845, Session 55 and ends in April 1862.

In 1845 the township has lately been divided and had many problems to straighten out with the newly formed townships, Snowden and Lower St. Clair. It still included a large area and the meetings, held in the

director's homes, were dated from Bridgeville, Mansfield and Upper St. Clair. There were eleven schools but two were vacant and two were "teaching by subscriptions," which meant the parents paid the teacher as had been the general practice before the enactment of the Public School Law in 1834. Eighteen dollars a month for a six month term beginning in May or June was the prevailing salary. An effort was made that year to have eight months but funds were not sufficient.

The school tax in 1845 was 1-3/8 mills and the amount collected \$395.93. Consequently a "petition from the teachers and other inhabitants praying for an advance in wages from \$18.00 to \$20.00<sup>22</sup> per month was negatived." However, in 1850 "males were raised to \$20.00, and females to \$16.00."

Bring this Notice with You.

*Allegheny Pa. Feb 25 1887*

*John W. Gilfillan*

Your Taxes for 1886, of the Tenth Ward, as per margin, are now due and payable to the undersigned. Payment is required within TEN DAYS from date. Warrants, with costs, will be added, if not promptly paid. If not convenient to come to my office, drop me a Postal Card, and I will call on you.

Office Hours—Every morning 10 to 12 A. M., and every evening after 4 P. M., and Saturday till noon.

CHAS. FUNORA, COLLECTOR.

Corner of Charles street and Pottsville Plank Road, (Toll Gate.)

|                  |      |                   |      |       |      |
|------------------|------|-------------------|------|-------|------|
| City             | 1680 | County            | 940  | Total | 2620 |
| Water            | ...  | State             | ...  | ...   | ...  |
| Business         | ...  | ...               | ...  | ...   | ...  |
| Poor             | 240  | ...               | ...  | ...   | ...  |
| School           | 675  | ...               | ...  | ...   | ...  |
| School Building  | 700  | 10 per cent added | 90   | ...   | ...  |
| Sinking F.       | 60   | ...               | ...  | ...   | ...  |
| Sewers           | 60   | ...               | ...  | ...   | ...  |
| Total            | 2435 | City Tax          | 3600 | ...   | ...  |
| 3 per cent added | 73   | Taken 1886        | ...  | ...   | ...  |
| Total            | 2508 | Total             | 4760 | ...   | ...  |

Several new frame buildings, replacing ones of logs, were put up in this period, all using the same plan. It called for a building twenty by thirty feet with an eight foot ceiling, one door, eight twelve-light windows, chimney, grate, desks, and seats. The cost was between

<sup>22</sup> According to [www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com) the 2013 median expected salary for a typical public school teacher would be approximately \$4270 per month.  
<sup>23</sup> 1887 taxes of Alexander Gilfillan, Part of the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair Archives Collection

two and three hundred dollars. A shovel, poker, bucket and dipper for \$1.18 3/4 completed the equipment. In 1852 there is the first mention of a blackboard, cost \$2.50.

School was in session on twenty-six days a month, and reading, writing, geography, grammar, regular and mental (oral) arithmetic and book-keeping by single entry were taught, all by one teacher, of course. Salaries rose to thirty dollars in 1857 and a six mil tax brought in \$2,100. There were nine schoolhouses in use in 1859, one in the "suburbs of Sodom." The term now began in September, with sessions from eight-thirty until four-thirty for the first three months, and from nine o'clock until four the last half. There was school every other Saturday. The budget rose to \$1,600 for teaching, \$600 for new buildings. Summer school for two months supported by private subscriptions was often arranged for the younger children.

All these older schools were one room buildings. Each had a raised platform at one end for the teacher's desk. The boys sat on one side of the room, the girls on the other. Pegs for wraps were in one corner and there was a small shelf for dinner baskets. A bucket on a small bench held the drinking water, brought by a privileged pair of children from the nearest spring or neighbor's well. There were tin candle sconces on the walls for the use of evening meetings which were later replaced by oil lamps in holders with tin reflectors. When carbon oil first came into use and people were afraid, with reason, of it exploding, there was a theory that a piece of red flannel in the oil would make it safe, so all the school lamps had a bit of flannel in them.

Graded courses as we have them today were unknown, a child's position in school being determined

by the reader he used – First, Second, etc. It was the custom to read and re-read the same book the whole year. This was true in all subjects as, for much of this period, books were not supplied by the township but bought by the parents. The now famous McGuffey Readers were in use for many years and children who not only read through each of them several times themselves but heard them read aloud by others every day for years, inevitably absorbed a lot of good English literature.

When school began in the Fall the attendance was made up of the younger children as the older boys and usually the girls were kept at home until the autumn farm work was done. By November they would be in school and one teacher had to cope with pupils aged from six to sixteen studying every subject. In the Spring the older ones dropped out again as they were needed. The school year ended in April.

Within the present boundaries of the township during the next fifty years the schools were Caldwell, on Old Washington Road; St. Clair, at the site of the present high school; Philips, on Fort Couch Road, between the two schools now there [Ft. Couch Middle School and Eisenhower Elementary School]; McMillan, the newest and first two-room building, built in 1894 and also on Fort Couch Road, now the location of the St. John Church; Cook and Bridgeville Schools, now both within that borough's limits; and Lesnett, high on the hill above Lesnett Road.

In 1900 the St. Clair School, always known as the school in the woods and still most affectionately remembered, was replaced by a two storied, white frame building on Washington Road and called Clifton. Only the first floor, or one room, was used prior to 1912. This



was a bright, cheerful room but oils lamps, a big coal stove in one corner and a water bucket and dipper still supplied the indoor utilities. In 1910 the school term was made nine months.

The graded system of instruction was begun in 1912 with a County examination at the end of eighth grade for promotion to high-school. At this time the second floor of Clifton School was put into use as a two year high school for the township. One teacher taught the eighth grade and, after the first year, both years of all the high-school subjects. The number in each class was small and the instruction was such that the pupils were able to go on for their final years at Bridgeville, Canonsburg or Pittsburgh without difficulty. There was no high-school in either Dormont or Mt. Lebanon at that time.

As the township grew, new and larger buildings were built at Clifton, Beadling and the Cook School site and the high school was given up. Lesnett and Caldwell schools were sold and those children taken to Clifton by bus.

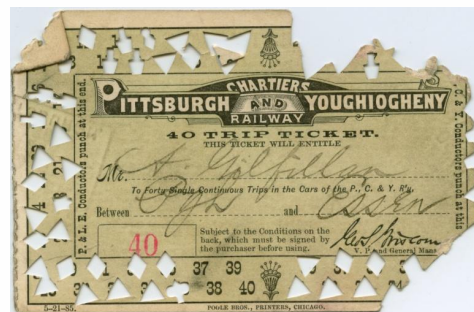
#### PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The first form of public transportation near enough to be of any use in traveling to Pittsburgh was the Chartiers Branch of the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and St. Louis Railroad, which was completed to Washington, Pennsylvania in 1871. It passed through the village of Bridgeville, following Chartiers Creek through the Boyce farm and the station was called Boyce.

A narrow gauge line, the Pittsburgh-Southern, but always called the "Old Southern," was opened for travel in 1878 between Temperanceville, the West End section of Pittsburgh, and Washington with a route very

similar to the later street car line. While far from a dependable means of travel, it was considered a great convenience by the people in the eastern side of the township; however, it was taken over by the Baltimore and Ohio in 1884 and abandoned. Fortunately, by then the Pittsburgh-Castle Shannon Railroad had been built. It ran nine trains a day from Castle Shannon to Mt. Washington and from there passengers took the Incline to Carson Street and the horsecars over to town. A round trip ticket including the Incline fare was forty cents in 1887.

In the early eighties the Painters Run Branch of the Pittsburgh, Chartiers and Youghiogheny (the P. C. & Y.) ran four passenger trains to Essen, one continuing to Morgan, now Beadling. The round trip fare to the P. & L. E. station in 1885 was seventy-five cents. This line was primarily for hauling coal.



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<sup>24</sup> Pittsburgh, Chartiers and Youghiogheny Trip Ticket, Part of the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair Archives Collection

The street car line which was built to Mt. Lebanon about 1898 made a much easier way of getting to Pittsburgh. One could always leave his horse at a friends or in the horse sheds at the United Presbyterian Church and ride right into the city. When the Washington Interurban street car line was built in 1908 with hourly service to Pittsburgh, commuting became comparatively simple and the first of the tide of city dwellers began to trickle into the township. These cars were very large and heavy with a smoking compartment and when in the country traveled at great speed. There were freight cars, too, which were a great convenience before the days of trucking, especially to the dairy farmers.

The first bus service between Pittsburgh and Washington started in the 1920's, the White Star Line, which had an odd type of bus, the seats being crosswise with a door for each row.

#### FARMING

Our early settlers were no doubt attracted to this region by the good soil, rolling land and plentiful springs. When cleared, and it was heavily timbered, it was good farming ground and for the first century and more most of the people did general farming, growing wheat, clover, and timothy hay, corn and oats in regular succession. Some sheep were kept but never the large flocks common in Washington County; in early times each family had enough to supply the family needs for clothing, blanket and coverlets. They also grew the flax for their household linens and clothing.

A farm can supply work for each season of the year, so here in Upper St. Clair the spring months found the men plowing and planting; in summer they were

busy with the harvest, cutting and husking the corn in the autumn and planting the winter wheat. Cold weather was the time for working in the woods, cutting and splitting rails for fences, butchering, always feeding the stock and with perhaps a little more time to linger at the store or blacksmith shop. A hired man received fifty cents a day in 1854 for general work, a dollar for harvesting and one dollar and a quarter for cradling<sup>25</sup>. If married he could rent a house for three dollars a month. A hired girl received one dollar a week.

General farming provided a living but the sale of lumber in early times, of coal mining rights and of gas leases later was a big help financially. Much of the lumber for the first Smithfield Street Bridge was cut and sawed in our township. This was the covered bridge which burned in the great fire of 1845.

As machinery developed methods changed; instead of cradling the grain and threshing it out with a flail<sup>26</sup>, the farmer used a binder and waited until the steam threshing came into the neighborhood taking the farms more or less in turn, neighboring with enough other farmers to insure plenty of help in his own barn.

The dinners for threshers have become something of a legend and those served in this township were certainly as good as the best. There was also supper in most cases in the steam engine days, breakfast for the men who had to fire up and fill the water wagons early in the morning, so had stayed overnight. The meals for the first day were something of a challenge to the housewife, knowing the men would tell at home of the kind of food they had; dinner the second day was more of a strain and any woman who had to get up a

<sup>25</sup> gathering

<sup>26</sup> A tool used to separate grain from the husk



second supper was cooked out. There were usually between fifteen and twenty men for dinner, fewer for supper, as mercifully some had to get home to do their milking.

### THE POOR AND DEPENDENT

In early times there were two Overseers of the Poor in each township whose duty it was to see that those unable to care for themselves, and without relatives to assume the responsibility, were put in charge of the person making the lowest acceptable bid for their care. Orphaned children were taken to raise by volunteer parents or were "bound out" to people who pledged themselves to feed and clothe them in return for the help they gave around the house or farm. But as the ever present problem increased, the counties of Pennsylvania assumed this burden. One of the township's residents was on the commission that in 1852 purchased the ground and built the Allegheny County Home at Woodville. However, it is interesting to note that the modern trend is toward placing elderly people, as well as, dependent children in private homes.

### THE TELEPHONE

The first Bell Telephone line was built from Bridgeville to the general store at Clifton about 1904 and a short time later one family installed its own telephone. In 1906 the McMurray Telephone Company was formed in adjoining Peters Township and gradually poles were set and line strung to bring another modern convenience to the township. The exchange was at McMurray and for some time did not have a connection to Pittsburgh so the two or three families who had occasion to call beyond the McMurray's limits had to have a "Bell," too.

Party lines<sup>27</sup> were, of course, the only kind available and with ten or fifteen homes on the line it took every combination of longs and shorts to give each family a distinguishing ring; two long and two shorts, one long and three shorts, two longs, and three even five longs, with of course one long ring for "Central."

There is no question that life became more interesting, but only those who have driven a horse, perhaps for miles, to summon a doctor or to carry some urgent message can really appreciate what a blessing this means of quick communication was.

### BOYCE STATION

Boyce Station was originally known as Hasting's Mill as there was a mill on Chartiers Creek operated by people of that name. When the Chartiers Valley Railroad was built in 1871, the station was called Boyce as it was on the Boyce farm. A general store, which later housed the postoffice, was soon started near the station and there was a blacksmith shop across the Creek. Many farmers shipped their milk to Pittsburgh on the 6:30 morning train. The store was a meeting place for the neighborhood, long remembered for barrels of oysters and turkey shoots. There were never many houses there so the children had to walk to the Caldwell School.

Not far from here, toward Bridgeville, Charles Godwin started a greenhouse in 1898 which, carried on by his sons and grandsons, is certainly the oldest business concern the township.

<sup>27</sup> A shared service phone line where two or more customers were connected to the same loop

### BEADLING

As progress made the various small crafts around the village of Upper St. Clair unnecessary, a much larger industry was opening in another part of the township. There was a rich vein of coal underlying most of the area, and it had been taken out in a small way in several sections, particularly along McLaughlin Run. But early in the 1880's Sanford and Company and Thomas Beadling and Sons started operations in Essen and Morgan, or as it is now known, Beadling. A branch of the Pittsburgh, Chartiers and Youghiogheny Railroad was built up Painters Run and several hundred miners were employed. Mr. Beadling built a company store and a number of houses, and a small Presbyterian Church which was under the care of Bethel.

There was serious labor trouble in September, 1893, a time of general financial depression, when according to the Pittsburgh Dispatch about half of the men were laid off and wages lowered. Rioting broke out and to quote the paper, "bullets rained thick and fast" but after a few days order was restored. The mines were continued until most of the best coal was taken out. When finally closed many of the miners bought their homes and remained, finding work elsewhere.

The Catholic Church built a Chapel, St. John's, in 1923.

### SOCIAL LIFE

Much of the social life of the township centered at the Upper St. Clair schoolhouse, the most centrally located. However, each school was used for occasional meetings and especially for evening singing schools. These were popular with the young people in wintertime and each family contributed toward paying the teacher

for a certain number of weeks and took oil or candles for lighting. A Mr. Philips from Library and John Kelso, who had a farm near Beadling, were favorite teachers.

Informal literary and debating societies were gotten up in the winter by the older people, with the program often brightened by musical numbers given by young folks. The papers and debates were all given by the members and, when we recall that there were no accessible public libraries and comparatively few books or magazines in the homes, we cannot but think that a lot of original thought must have been expressed. There were no officers or minutes but in an old diary we find that these subjects were debated in March [7,] 1855, "Is a prohibitory liquor law beneficial and are secret societies beneficial to Society?" These were interesting topics at a time when the members of the Associate Reform Church (now United Presbyterian) to which a number of the people belonged were not allowed to join a Lodge, while the Presbyterian neighbors suffered no such restriction. In December, 1873 at Lesnett School the question, "Shall the new Constitution be adopted?" was debated with Warren Philips and John Conner taking the affirmative and Len Fryer and Fred Lesnett the negative side. This is our present Constitution.

An occasional travelling lecturer or a Magic Lantern show brought the people together for a social evening at the schoolhouse. Sometimes a Farmer's Institute was held when the men met to hear a talk on some new development in farming and to exchange their own ideas.







On the evening of July 26, 1874 there was a very severe cloudburst over much of the Allegheny County which caused the death of more than one hundred and fifty persons and destroyed a great deal of property. The Pittsburgh Gazette, under the headings "Appalling Disaster," "Fearful Record of a July Sabbath," includes this account of the storm in our area:

“Not only did it carry these objects, but it also undermined dwellings and carried death to several families. In Sodom the house of a respectable farmer name McCleave was completely destroyed and yesterday noon the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. McCleave and their three children were taken from the swollen waters, nearly a mile from their late residence. William Stratton, a coal miner who lived nearby, had his house swept away and his wife and five children drowned. He escaped, miraculously lodging, he scarcely knew how, in the top of a sycamore tree. The bodies of his wife and children have been recovered.

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## A BARN RAISING

“For a long time before the barn was started Father was drawing plans. When the location was decided on he and Mr. Williams, the Carpenter, went to our woods and marked the oaks to be used for the framework. The barn was to be forty by sixty feet and the long sills and beams were cut and hauled by oxen to the saw-mill in the village.”

“Many of the wives came to help in the house, and dinner and supper were served at long tables in the grape arbor. I remember I was swinging in the backyard with two little girls when Uncle Andy (Gilfillan) came through the gate and said it was finished and no one was hurt, which was a great thing. Afterwards it was talked of, how well it was planned, not one timber too long or too short and each raised to its right place.”

“The family of Mr. Isaac Reemer, a coal miner on Painters Run, was washed away in their home and have not been heard from. There were three persons.”

In the days when there were few mechanical sounds about us the tone of the bell carried a great distance and there were many bells. Most of the farms had a dinner bell on a post handy to the back door, each with a different tone easily recognized so one knew when supper was ready at home away over the hills. Then there was the butcher's bell which he rang as he neared a house in his closed wagon in which he carried meat, much of which he had probably dressed the day before.

On Sabbath mornings the distant bells of St. Anne and St. Agatha sounded clearly and the tone of Bethel's bell was as familiar as the voice of a close friend. In early days it was tolled when a member of the church died, one stroke for each age, and this was called "ringing the passing bell."

The first change from farm to subdivision began when the Freehold Real Estate Company purchased the



Alfred Fife farm on Washington Road to add to the land in Bethel Township already being developed, known as the Brookside Farm Plan. The deed for this section was recorded on March 22, 1913. The same company bought the John Johnston farm and recorded the Willowbrook Farms Plan on April 9, 1915. Both developments were near enough to the newly built Washington Interurban streetcar line to attract people whose employment was in Pittsburgh, and this started the transition of Upper St. Clair Township from a country to a suburban Community.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2013 Edition

The facts written about in this book are considered current at the last publication under Margaret Gilfillan's care (1997). Facts and resources that are confirmed appear with visual representations or footnotes. As the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair continues to digitize its archives, it is hoped that many more supporting resources will be uncovered.

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## Margaret Boyd Gilfillan



Margaret Gilfillan, a life-long resident of Upper St. Clair, was born in 1901 in the family home at 123 Orr Road to Alexander and Annie Martha Boyd Gilfillan. She had an older brother, John born at the Boyd house in Mt. Lebanon and a younger brother, Alexander, born in the Orr Road home (John, Margaret and Alexander pictured above). When her Mother died in 1903, her Father moved her and her brothers to his family's home on Washington Road where his two sisters lived and cared for them. Margaret attended Clifton School through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Walking though the Brookside Farms area, she rode the trolley to Canonsburg High School. After high school she attended Pennsylvania College for Women (PCW) now Chatham University. She majored in English. During inclement weather, she stayed with extended family in the Shadyside area of Pittsburgh. After graduation, she stayed at home to help her aging aunt and substituted in the local schools. Her father died in 1934 and Aunt Eleanor in 1937, leaving Margaret to care for her two brothers and the homestead. She was active in the Mt. Lebanon United Presbyterian Church and was a member of the Board of the Children's Home in Mars, PA. She was a member of the first Women's Club of Upper St. Clair and the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair. Her hobbies were reading, crocheting and making molasses cookies for family and friends. Margaret passed away in May of 2001 being of sound mind but frail of body, leaving a wealth of historic papers, pictures, and artifacts along with a 15 acre farm and buildings to the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair.

