



May 1, 2013

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM

. . . while dusting

Within the compiling of the Shunk School are multiple writings, none signed, in the format of what appears to be essays concerning the history of the first schools in Shunk, Fox Township. They were all done,

according to the titled lead in of one, for "Golden Anniversary, Class of 1908, Shunk High". It begins "Our class 50 years old?" That means that a school or class room somewhere in Fox Twp. began in 1858, much earlier than thus far found in recorded history. The writer goes on with his (or hers) thoughts on anniversary of the school: "Either there's a mistake in arithmetic or else we're getting old. Anyhow it seems like yesterday. 1908 givth Frank D. Smigelsky – that was the birth of Shunk High all right. Even a weak memory must recall how Smig used to stand between classes at the south window² near the stove and crunch peanuts while gazing wistfully toward Pleasant Valley where some fair young ladies lived.

"Most vivid remains the gala occasion of the Forksville fair, where the main attraction back then centered in the athletic meet. A good laugh recurs in the recollection of Ed Frey's violent stomach upset after being induced to try a bite of limburger cheese sandwich. But the highlight was the prowess of strong man Jesse Salisbury. Witness again his demonstration on the machine wield-the-sledge-to-ring-the-bell and win a trinket or a cheap cigar, three whacks for a nickel. With one hefty swing Jesse not only rang the bell but also rocked the upright standard so violently that the proprietor had to grab fast to keep it from toppling. Of course Jesse's outstanding feat was a champion shotputter. Having gained proficient practice by hurling huge boulders in the pasture at home, he found the much lighter shot a sort of child's play, enabling him to set an all time record for the event. As he stepped up for his turn an exciting scene was enacted. Knowing his range, Jesse began to shout to the spectators gathered around the lower end of the pit "Move back down there! You'll get hit. Back farther!" They inched back, laughing. "Farther! Farther yet!" An official spoke up, "Oh, go ahead. We're back far enough out of your way." Jesse unleashed a heave that sent the shot sailing in a long arch to land on the grass beyond the put and bounce downfield, a mark some 15 feet better than the nearest rivals, scattering the crowd and narrowly missing the astounded official, who exclaimed in admiration, "Who said his name is Jesse? He isn't Jessie; he's Samson!"

Another writer's excerpt transcribes an entry from the 1857 records: "Re3ceived of past treasurer one three-dollar counterfeit bill which has been handed down from treasurer to treasurer. (The chronicle fails to report whether it was used in payment of orders.)"

And a closing paragraph in one of the writings could be about any school of old: "The good old schools of readin' and 'ritin' and 'rthmetic have all gone. Two perished by fire, one by decay, the rest by wrecking bar. Dismembered and scattered about the community, the sturdy frames of the familiar landmarks still survive in homes, cabins, garages, and barns. Memory preserves them intact in childhood impressions and associations. The old schools endure in the hearts of many generations of grown-ups recalling the dear old happy school days."

It seems human nature for young people of any generation to be in hurry to leave school and get on with the rest of life's experience. But, as youth passes you by and entry into middle or later age becomes a reality, we tend to view more fondly the memories of our school days – even if the building itself is no longer there.