

Oct. 30, 2019

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM . . . while dusting

From the annals of history within YOUR museum we often find the most unique scenarios. Within an envelope was discovered a Sullivan Review newspaper clipping dated Thursday, November 30, 1905. The following is the initial transcription of that article:



“A tragedy occurred in this place Saturday afternoon, which has cast a gloom over the entire community and caused the most profound sorrow in every circle. Ivan, the eleven-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Thayer, broke through the ice while skating and was drowned.

“On Thursday night a thin skum of ice had formed, and, although it was generally considered unsafe there was quite a sprinkling of boys on the mill pond Friday. Friday afternoon and Friday night the ice thawed a little, and looked as though it would hardly bear the weight of a sparrow, but Saturday there were still a few adventurous youngsters who persisted in trying it. Young Thayer was one of these. About four o'clock, he, in company with half a dozen other boys, was skimming like birds over the half frozen surface, but cautiously keeping to the eastern side, where there is an extensive mud flat, and the water is very shallow. If they had broken through there no more serious trouble than wet feet would have occurred. Finally Ivan Thayer started to skate clear across. To do this it was necessary to cross the creek channel, but he started, like a shuttle, to dart across. His skate cut through the thin ice, his toe caught, and he fell full length into the icy waters. The lad was a good swimmer, and almost immediately began to paddle and call for help. In a very short space of time there were two hundred people on the banks of the pond, all shouting advice to the struggling boy. The ice was just thin enough that it would not bear the weight of a man, and at the same time rendered it almost impossible to reach the boy. He was about seventy-five feet from the shore, and swam around and around in the circle of icy water, the ice breaking under his weight whenever he attempted to climb out. Planks were thrown on the ice, and attempts made to reach him that way, but the ice broke under their weight. Dan Casey plunged into the water, and started to swim and break his way to the struggling boy, who saw him coming and cried, “Casey, Casey, help me.” Half way out he was seized with a cramp, and obliged to return to the shore, to save his own life. Then Otto Behr, of Shady Nook, who was visiting in town, performed the most heroic act that has been witnessed in years.”

This story will continue in next week's issue. Until then, you can reach the museum for visits or research request by phoning 570-946-5020 or emailing museum@scpahistory.com. Meanwhile, visit our web site at www.scpahistory.com and please like us on Facebook

Nov. 6, 2019

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM . . . while dusting

To complete last week's article, we will continue with the 11/30/1902 Sullivan Review newspaper article concerning the drowning of Ivan Thayer with "Then Otto Behr, of Shady Nook, who was visiting in town, performing the most heroic act that as been witnessed in years."



"He swam out through the broken ice, reached the point where Casey failed, and then, deliberately breaking the ice ahead of him with hands bleeding, and the icy water chilling his very bones, he reached the boy, who had sank and rose for the third time, and succeeded in keeping him afloat until a boar was launched and pushed out to him. Willing hands carried the unconscious boy to the house of C.T. Lilley, where everything that medical skill could do, was done to resuscitate him, but to no avail. The boy was in the water about twenty minutes, and was under the water, in all, about four minutes. The lifeless body was taken to his home, and the funeral and interment was at St. Basil's at ten o'clock Tuesday. The schools were dismissed during the funeral services, his school mates attending the funeral in a body, and contributing a beautiful floral piece, as a testimony of their affection. Floral pieces were also contributed by members of the bar, the town council, of which Mr. Thayer is secretary, the Knights of Maccabees, of which he is a prominent member, the alumni of the high school, and by private parties.

"For the stricken father and mother, and the brothers and sisters, the tenderest sympathy is expressed. The loss is not theirs alone, for the entire town mourns with them, and all feel the weight of their affliction."

What made this piece even more interesting is that the clipping was found in an envelope from J.H. Thayer's law firm (with Harney, lawyers of Dushore) postmarked Dec. 2, 1905 to Otto Behr with the following hand written note:

"Dear friend, It is impossible for me to express adequately the gratitude I feel for the heroic manner in which you tried to rescue my dear son Ivan. I know you do not expect or desire to be thanked, for such men as you never do. But be assured that a sorrowing father and mother will ever remember you, and pray God that if you or any of your dear ones are ever in peril, He will send some one with a heart and courage like yours to assist in the hour of need, Sincerely yours, J. H. Thayer."

This article expresses the heartbreak of one family's loss, while exemplifying the courage of another person. For this and more you can visit your museum by appointment by phoning 570-946-5020 or emailing museum@scpahistory.com or simply by happenchance if you see the 'open' sign in the window. Also, visit our website at www.scpahistory.com and please like us on Facebook.