



Jan. 3, 2024

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM . . . while dusting

With the Christmas season having surrounded us and the turning to another year, it was timely that we discovered the following piece in the compilings of Ricketts. It was transcribed and sent to the Museum by Patricia Mathias Gunton of Dalton, Pa. in 2015 and became part of the written history of Ricketts. The piece was written by Ms. Gunton's aunt, Mildred Eilenberger Snyder. The article is entitled Our Pastor Smith.

Arthur Smith was born in Gouldsboro, PA April 12, 1873. His father, George G. Smith, was one of the organizers of Grace Church (in Gouldsboro). In what was then wild country, young Arthur was raised. Suddenly, for no reason whatsoever, he became addicted to solving puzzles. It came about in this manner. At about the age of 13, he read a book by Jules Verne in which the plot depends on the solution of a cipher. Verne made the claim that this cipher could only be solved by guessing correctly the name at the end of the cipher. That was a challenge; guessing to Arthur was decidedly unscientific. If a cipher could be devised, it could be broken. However, it was not until just before the First World War that Pastor Smith publically broke the code that Jules Verne used."

The piece goes on to describe how Smith solved the cipher. But it also details the extent of knowledge the man now had to basically break codes. And to that point, in 1942 he wrote an article on the Secret Language of War, which had been requested by the editor of Popular Science, the magazine. Thus, showing how well known Smith was in this field.

The transcription goes on with "He never went into government service officially, but when you know that a rear admiral of the U.S. Navy has written to him about codes, you know that his reputation and ability along this line are quite beyond the ordinary.

"But this is only one side of Pastor Smith's personality. He is first and foremost a minister of the Gospel. His work as a pastor comprises a story that is delightful yet sad, a living example of the Holy Spirit working through a man's talents to bring the Gospel to human hearts.

"It was July 1906 that Pastor Smith's life work began, for it was then that he went from the quiet atmosphere of Mt. Airy Seminary to his first charge at Ricketts, PA. Ricketts was a lumber town, no longer in existence. When Arthur Smith went there the town had 300 families in addition to three large lumber camps in the region roundabout employing 500 lumberjacks. It was here as he expresses it that he saw a lot of fights, heard sulphurous profanity, and preached the gospel. Here also he saw and heard a sawmill boiler blow up and kill a man 100 yards away, while the foreman crawled out from under the wreckage unhurt.

“God had called him to a hard task and he shouldered it bravely. Each Sunday morning he taught a class, then conducted church service with sermon, had a bite to eat, hopped on a railroad bicycle and pumped his way seven to ten miles into the lumber camps, held service for these men, then pumped his way back to town in time for another meal before Luther League; and after League, church service with sermon. Some Sundays Pastor Smith would borrow a flat car and locomotive from the sawmill in town, put a portable organ on the flat car with his choir and organist, invite the town folk to go with him and, with these people crowded on the flat car, away he would go to the lumber camps for a church service.”

Bringing the Gospel to a frontier town had to have been a labor of love and Pastor Smith exemplifies that in his energies. We'll complete this transcription in our next installment. In the meantime, you can contact the Sullivan County Museum by phoning 570-946-5020 or by emailing scpahistory@gmail.com. Appointments are necessary until spring or by happen chance if you see the 'open' sign in the window.



Jan. 10, 2024

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM . . . while dusting

We will continue on from last week with the transcription by Mildred Snyder on Pastor Arthur Smith.

“In that lumber town of Ricketts there was no form of entertainment for the people, so Pastor Smith began to make up Bible puzzles and cryptograms. Competition to solve these became quite acute. Individuals would come to his room (he lived over the company store) and ask his permission to look up words in his Bible dictionary.

“Bible puzzles and Bible cryptograms became a recreation for these people living in the wilderness away from the entertainments of the city. Thus it was that Pastor Smith, through his special talent, could teach the Gospel story to these people while at the same time give them entertainment.

“At Ricketts some of the lumberjacks were exceedingly clever fellows with their hands and tools. The friendship of these men was cultivated by Pastor Smith who got them to teach him their trade. He learned little tricks in soldering and in the use of saws and, of course, once these lumberjacks could teach him something they in turn had a new respect for “Revenner” Smith. Pastor Smith, won't say how many lumberjacks he converted, but they did accord him respect and honor which in itself was quite an accomplishment.

“By coupling his natural talents with what he learned, Pastor Smith made various and sundry items for the delight and instruction of his people. For example, he made a kaleidoscope of different patterns for every family in the congregation. He also made a fluoroscopy [a machine for examining internal structures by viewing the shadows cast on a fluorescent screen by objects through which X-rays are directed], and had great difficulty in convincing the lumberjacks that they were really seeing the bones of their hands. He was interested in static electricity and made a machine. He invited six men to see this “newfangled” instrument and to stand in a circle attached to the machine, the “Revenner” began turning the wheel. Soon there was a six inch spark and the mighty conquerors of trees began to dance to the tune of static.

“Needless to say, “Revenner” Smith became a wizard of the wilderness and when he preached lumberjacks listened. During the summer he conducted a private school for the children of Ricketts. Many members of his congregation have said that they don't know what they would have done without their Pastor, for he made life joyous and interesting to them.”

We'll continue with the last portion on the life of Pastor Smith next week. But in the meantime, you can contact the Museum by phoning 570-946-5020 or emailing scpahistory@gmail.com



Jan. 17, 2023

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM . . . while dusting

This is the last in a three-part installment from the transcription done by Mildred Snyder on Pastor Arthur Smith in Ricketts.

“Gradually the lumberjacks around Ricketts became exhausted and the people began to leave. [In truth it was the lumber itself that was being exhausted, not the men.] Pastor Smith decided that he would stay with the people as long as any remained. At this time it was purposed that the congregations at Ricketts and Mildred combine and under this arrangement Pastor Smith began work at Trinity Church, Mildred. One year later, 1913, Ricketts became completely non-existent.

“At Mildred, says Pastor Smith, “I got into everything except matrimony”. When the newly purchased static electric machine in the New Albany High School physics department broke down, no one could fix it except Pastor Smith. He was also a cabinetmaker and a clock fixer. During the war [that’d be WWI] when alarm clocks were not to be had, all the good people of Mildred brought their broken-down clocks to him for repair. He said he never lost a clock. He has a trick of pressing newspapers into boards. The finished project looks like wallboard and makes a very neat cabinet.

“Fame as a cryptanalyst could have been his, but instead he chose to preach the Gospel to folk who lived in the lumber camps and mining camps of PA. Unfortunately, the town of Mildred has not fared much better than Ricketts. Although it was a prosperous mining community, about 70 miles west of Scranton, its coal deposits have now become exhausted. In 1930 when things were low and nearly every family was on relief, Pastir Smith told the council that he would serve without any stated salary, taking as his portion what was left of the money contributed for current expenses after other expenses were paid. He would not leave for he said, “If I leave who would come?”.

“On June 30, 1946 he announced to his congregation that he was retiring from the ministry [He was 73 at this time.]. In the country about Mildred he was a familiar figure. His name and personality and his unique gifts have done more in that area than the world will ever know.

‘Gouldsboro was very happy to welcome Pastor Smith back home. He may have retired but not completely as Grace Church, Gouldsboro, too needed a helping hand. While Pastor Angelo was here many times due to poor health he called up Pastor Smith to supply for him. Then after Rev. Herr left this pastorate, Pastor Smith became the supply for more than a year. Now he devotes his time to Sunday School where he is loved by all.”

An ode read to him on his 85th birthday stated “He remains a true shepherd who never deserted his flock. It is no mystery, therefore, that the people love him. He is more than a Pastor. He is a living, walking example of hope and joy and patience and Christian charity to all who have made his acquaintance. Our Pastor Smith”.

Pastor Smith passed away at the age of 88 in Gouldsboro in June of 1961 – forever the eternal angel of the Lord.

There are many such stories within the annals of the contents of YOUR museum, about people in all walks of life who have contributed to the welfare of the people of Sullivan County, PA. This has been just one glimpse about just one of those people.

For this and more, you can contact the Museum for an appointment or research request by phoning 570-946-5020 or emailing scpahistory@gmail.com