

MORNING WORSHIP, QUIET AFTERNOONS: WHEN SUNDAYS WERE DIFFERENT

It was May 3, 1931, and a growing crime wave in Waynesburg was threatening to burst into full blossom, unless the town's law enforcement authorities could nip it in the bud. Determined to do just that, police fanned out in the community, knowing exactly where they could find hotbeds of criminal activity in town.

They struck pay dirt.

Lawbreakers all over town were caught committing criminal acts, nabbed red-handed on their own property. Men who for years had been known as good providers, men of upstanding character, now had their true natures revealed. Their filthy habit was unearthed for all to see.

In back yards throughout Waynesburg, a Greene County version of *Crime and Punishment* was played out. Stunned wrongdoers stopped their illicit activity, obeyed police instructions, and surrendered their tools of crime.

Spades clattered to the ground.

Hoes were tossed aside.

Garden rakes were left lying in the broken earth.

The offenders wiped their soiled hands on their trousers and stood in disbelief as each was informed that he would have to appear before the Justice of the Peace to answer for his transgressions.

Two days later, on Tuesday, May 5, 1931, the offenders got a reprieve. The local newspaper, the *Brownsville Telegraph*, reported that Waynesburg authorities had had a change of heart. The lawbreakers who had been caught in the act on Sunday would be allowed to go unpunished.

The *Telegraph* reported, "Announcement that no prosecutions or hearings would be given violators yesterday terminated Waynesburg's attempted enforcement of ancient state laws prohibiting Sunday manual labor. [On] Sunday statements were made that several reputed violators were slated for hearings last night, most of whom were said to have been engaged in garden making and other domestic occupations on the Sabbath."

Gardening.

That was the crooked cultivators' dirty deed.

The scofflaw seedslingers had run afoul of Pennsylvania's Blue Laws, an array of legislative acts rooted in the Commonwealth's ancient Quaker beginnings. The blue laws date back to 1682, when William Penn put them in place to "preserve the Lord's Day and to promote piety and virtue in Pennsylvania." Since then, these laws have been repeatedly amended.

Why call them "blue laws?" A popular explanation is that the Sabbath laws in the early New Haven, Connecticut colony were printed on blue paper. The idea of Sabbath laws can be traced as far back as ancient Rome, where the first Christian emperor, Constantine I, commanded all citizens except farmers to rest on Sunday. Here in America, the first blue laws were enacted in the early 1600s in Virginia.

Blue laws still exist in the United States. The *Reader's Companion to American History* estimates that three-fourths of the states "still carry on their books laws imposing some kind of Sunday restriction on such activities as retail sales, general labor, liquor sales, boxing, hunting, or barbering, as well as polo, cockfighting, or clam digging."

Most of these laws have been challenged in recent years as violations of the First Amendment's prohibition of a state "establishment of religion." Surprisingly though, many blue laws have been upheld by the U. S. Supreme Court on the grounds that they serve the non-religious function of regulating public health, safety and welfare.

On May 5, 1931, the same day that charges were dropped against the Waynesburg gardeners, the Pennsylvania state legislature voted down a proposed amendment to the 1794 Sunday Law of Pennsylvania. That law prohibited most commercial activities on Sundays, but it permitted milk deliveries before 9 a.m. and after 5 p.m. The new amendment would have allowed milk delivery until 10 a.m., but when politicians tacked on a proposal to also permit Sunday baseball, the baseball provision doomed the bill. Milkmen continued to race the clock to complete their Sunday route by 9 a.m.

In 1939, Pennsylvania overhauled its blue laws, but they still banned "all worldly employment, business and sports on Sunday." Only works of charity and necessity, such as delivery of milk and "necessaries," were permitted, along with "wholesome recreation" such as golf, tennis, boating, swimming, bowling, basketball, picnicking, and shooting at inanimate targets.

In 1959, Pennsylvania added still more restrictions, forbidding the retail sale of clothing and wearing apparel, clothing accessories, furniture, housewares, home business or office furnishings, household,

business or office appliances, hardware, tools, paints, building and lumber supply materials, jewelry, silverware, watches, clocks, luggage, musical instruments and recordings, and toys, excluding novelties and souvenirs.

Also outlawed was the Sunday sale of motor vehicles and trailers, operation of pool or billiard rooms, conduct of boxing or wrestling matches, harness racing, and pawn brokering. Sunday movies were allowed, but only after 2 p.m. (with the municipality's consent), and baseball, football and polo were permitted only between 1 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday sale of alcohol was prohibited except in private clubs and certain restaurants.

Hunting and shooting on Sunday were banned, and barbers or beauticians who worked on Sunday faced license revocation. Even male prisoners were not permitted to do manual labor on Sunday. In addition to this list of unlawful activities, others were legal but were frowned upon by the church as being inappropriate on the Lord's Day.

So, what was left to do on a Sunday?

For many former residents of this area, visiting friends and relatives topped the list.

"Sunday afternoons were usually spent on the porch with family when the weather was warm," observed Jeanne Luda-Barrett of Columbia Station, Ohio, "and around the kitchen table when the weather was cold. Sundays were also reserved for visiting the cemeteries and taking care of the graves."

Keith Jobes of Melbourne, Florida added, "Sunday was the day to either visit or dine with relatives, at your house or at theirs. In the spring, Sunday after church was the time for going to the cemetery to clean up the graves in anticipation of planting flowers for Decoration Day. Sometimes we took a picnic lunch and ate in the cemetery, which my grandchildren today find morbid but was common back in those days."

"Going to church and visiting family was what Sundays were for," said Rosalie Coughenour of Connellsville. "Families were much closer then. If we were not visiting family, they were visiting us. My grandparents and I would often visit my Aunt Opal and Uncle Jim Galley, who had a farm past Flatwoods. I was permitted to gather eggs and play the piano and sing while Sunday dinner was being prepared, and conversation at dinner was intense."

On the farm, one could have wholesome fun without worrying about getting caught in the bewildering maze of blue laws and church rules.

"After Sunday School, my dad would take us to visit friends on several farms in the Bull Run Road area," recalled South Brownsville native Hannah Millward Fisher, "where we would visit and check on the

cows and pigs. We would come back home to a cooked dinner, and often company would drop by to spend the afternoon. When they left after supper, my dad would load up the visitors' cars with fruits and vegetables."

What about those folks who did not care to spend Sunday afternoon at the cemetery or on the farm? As it turns out, there were plenty of other legal options available. Next, other readers tell us about their typical Sabbath activities in an era of blue laws and quiet Sundays.

A SUNDAY MEAL AND AN AFTERNOON WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

The young woman's fingers impatiently pushed the thick drapery material toward the whirring sewing machine needle. Her late mother's old sewing machine was now serving a new generation, one with a bit faster pace to life.

"My husband Jack and I had just moved into a new parsonage," said Republic native Mildred Winterhalter Keppel of Wheeling, West Virginia, "and it needed drapes in the recreation room. I was making use of every minute, so one Sunday afternoon I sat down at my mother's old sewing machine. I promptly ran the needle through my index finger, and I could hear my mother saying from her grave, 'You know you are not supposed to work on Sunday!'"

Decades ago, Sunday was a day of rest for many families, and religious beliefs combined with state laws helped maintain that restful atmosphere. Even domestic chores in the home were discouraged.

"My mother did not permit us to sew on Sundays," said Mary Dalson Wenick of Belle Vernon.

"I can remember that my grandmother didn't particularly like me to cut out paper dolls on Sunday," added Hannah Millward Fisher of Corona, Arizona. "I could play with them as long as I did not do any cutting."

"Housework would never be done on Sundays," concurred Paula Terreta Skrobot of Columbus, Ohio, "but of course, that has changed today. Sunday is one of the only days I can get some of my housework done before I start my work week, but I still feel guilty if I hang laundry out on the line on Sunday. What would my mother think?"

Louise Zayance Manski of Poplar Lane Court, Uniontown, grew up under similar rules.

"I lived in Rowes Run with my parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Zayance, for many years," Louise explained. "On Sunday mornings, we walked to

St. Cecilia's Church, because we didn't own a car. We did not wash, iron clothing, or sew on Sundays or Holy Days back then. To this day, I still do not do those things on Sundays or Holy Days."

What about the men? Pennsylvania's Blue Laws prohibited most places of employment from operating on Sunday, so many men had the day off from their paid employment. Did they work instead at chores around the house?

"It was church canon at that time that Sunday was a Holy Day, and it was to be set aside as a day of rest," recalled Hiller native Harry Hackney, now living in Tampa. "Many men were glad to comply with this custom and would not lift a hand on Sunday to do anything, not even mow the lawn. Many men spent the whole day dressed in their 'Sunday Best' and engaged in rest and relaxation."

Not so for the woman of the house, though.

"Women were not under such a religious obligation," Harry said, "and in some ways, their Sundays were indistinguishable from the rest of the week."

Indeed, even the Pennsylvania Blue Laws permitted certain "necessary" chores to be done on Sundays. The major domestic task that housewives faced on Sundays was preparation of the Sunday dinner.

"We were of Italian descent, so it was a tradition that we had spaghetti and meatballs on Sunday," Dolores DeSalvo Mills of Martinsburg, West Virginia, told me. "When my mother would wake us up to go to church, I could already smell the spaghetti sauce and meatballs cooking on the stove.

"We lived in West Brownsville. People walked a lot more in the old days, and everyone did not have an automobile. We had a long walk to and from St. Peter's Church in Brownsville, and my mother and father expected my five brothers and myself to be there for dinner. My brothers' friends would happen to drop by, and of course my mother would invite them to eat with us. At the time I did not realize they dropped by because they loved her sauce and meatballs.

"After dinner was over and the dishes were done, my mother and father would go out in the yard and sit under the walnut tree. Other neighbors were also in their yards, or they went for a walk and stopped by to talk. There were no televisions, shopping malls, or cell phones, just a peaceful Sunday afternoon. It was an era when men worked hard and mothers stayed home, and there was more family tradition. I would love to go back in time so my children and grandchildren could experience the wonderful days of yesterday."

Some ladies prepared as much as they could the day before, so that Sunday dinner could be quickly prepared after the family returned

from church.

“Since it was to be a day of rest,” recalled Hannah Fisher, “almost everything but the roast had been done the day before. The dessert was made, often pies or a large cake; and a gelatin salad was prepared; perfection salad if we were having beef or orange Jell-O with pineapple and carrots if ham was served. After dinner, the remaining roast was cut and sliced for sandwiches for Sunday supper.”

Harry Hackney had a hand in preparing his family’s chicken dinner.

“My mother’s Catholic family had a chicken dinner every Sunday after the second Mass at Holy Rosary Church in Republic,” Harry said. “Chicken was a special treat in those days before the chicken industry adopted the assembly lines of today. Our chickens were home grown and processed. It is hard to forget soaking the chicken in boiling water and plucking the feathers, then burning the fuzz off the chicken carcass with a newspaper torch.

“Chicken was relatively expensive, so it was reserved for special occasions. I always got a leg, and we talked my younger brother, Graham, Jr., into thinking that the heart and gizzard were a special treat.”

“Church attendance was a priority,” South Brownsville native Bonnie Bryan Magee noted. “My family attended St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church on High Street. On Sunday morning, my mother would rush to put a roast in the oven before church so it would be done when we got home. A large family meal on Sunday was a priority in my home, and one made no plans for the afternoon until it was finished. There were always lots of leftovers from the large dinner, and they were eaten for a lighter evening meal, often shared by friends or family who visited.”

And what about the kids? What were youngsters permitted to do on a Sunday afternoon, after dinner was over?

“We were not allowed to get dirty,” lamented South Brownsville native Chuck Hosler, now of Willoughby, Ohio, “so Tommy Crawford’s hill was out of the question. We would just dress up and hang around the house or visit my uncle’s at Malden, where my dad and his brothers would pitch horseshoes. After Sunday School, the day was a bummer.”

That was not true for everyone, though. Some of the older youths had access to an automobile, which opened all sorts of possibilities. Driving to the mountains or visiting a favorite swimming spot were both appropriate Sunday pastimes, and many folks have contacted me to share memories of their enjoyable Sunday afternoons.

Bring your picnic lunch and join us. We will be heading up the mountain for a Sunday afternoon at Gorley’s Lake!

MEMORIES OF SUMMER SUNDAY AFTERNOONS AT GORLEY'S LAKE

"Stop running!" the lifeguard shouted, and not for the first time. As usual, his warning was too late.

"I can still hear those lifeguards shouting 'Stop running!' as we tried to see who could jump the farthest out into the lake," recalled former Brownsville resident Hank Greenberg of Woodland Hills, California. Hank was reminiscing about his youthful adventures at Gorley's Lake, a mountain resort located along Route 40, eleven miles east of Uniontown. Gorley's Lake was a Sunday afternoon Mecca for young people, whose recreational options were limited by the state's blue laws and by religious restrictions.

"We would compete," said Hank, "to see who could make the biggest splash by doing a 'bellywhopper!'"

"No loud noises were allowed on Sunday," noted Jerry Cramer, now of Macomb, Michigan. "It was a day for peace and quiet. If you were fortunate enough to own a car, it was a treat to go for a ride in the mountains."

"Since Sundays were devoted to family," Hank Greenberg continued, "we generally went up to Braddock's Grave on Sundays in the summertime, where we would have a picnic and play outdoor games. While in the mountains, we were sure to take a trip to Gorley's Lake for a swim. They had a clubhouse where you could get something to eat and change into your swimsuit. There was a grassy knoll where you could spread a blanket and get a suntan.

"A dock extended far into the water, and we kids would run to see how far we could jump into the lake. When you hit the water, you were shocked at how cold the water was. When you touched the bottom, you could feel the slimy cold mud between your toes, and you were certain a snake was going to grab you!"

Anyone hoping to take a nostalgic trip to the mountains this summer to enjoy one more dip in Gorley's Lake for old times' sake will be sorely disappointed. In 1957, Gorley's Lake Hotel was sold to the Oak Lake Bruderhoff community, and that ended the resort's reign as a premier vacation and swimming attraction.

Eight years later in 1965, the Bruderhoff remodeled the hotel, changed their organization's name to New Meadow Run Bruderhoff, and completely drained the lake. Where youngsters once sprinted the length of a wooden dock and hurtled into a clear mountain lake, only a landscaped sea of grass remains. Gorley's Lake, the scene of long-ago summer fun for thousands of area residents, is no more.

Picnics at Gorley's Lake were an acceptable form of Sunday recreation, and there were plenty of other popular picnic spots in the area.

"We often went to an area called Deems Grove [near Centerville]," Hank Greenberg said, "where we kids played softball, ate hot dogs, and just ran around, while the men played cards and the women talked or knitted. To get rid of the kids and all the noise we were making, the men would form carpools, recruit helpers to watch us, and take us to Rosefield's swimming pool, which was close by. The pool was large with a round platform in the middle of the deep-water section. The platform could hold about fifteen persons, and you would try to jump on as it was spinning around.

"They had a very high three-tier diving platform, and most of us kids would dare each other to jump off it. When you jumped, it was a real rush because you thought you would never hit the water. Some kids chickened out after they climbed up to the platform, and they had to pass a chorus of boos and catcalls as they slunk down backwards on the ladders to get to the bottom."

Hiking was another activity with which sticklers for strict observance of Sunday laws could not find fault. Keith Jobes of Melbourne, Florida, remembers some favorite Sunday walking adventures with his uncle.

"Our family's Sunday activity in the springtime was going with my Uncle Curt Livingston for a walk up the railroad tracks to pick poke," Keith remarked. "As I recall, we had to walk through one of the railroad tunnels, and Uncle Curt would always scare us by saying that he heard a train coming. The fact that he worked for the Monongahela Railway and knew when the trains ran never entered our minds. It was great fun!"

For Jean Huston Bright of Brownsville, Sunday afternoon meant picking up her roller skates and heading for the roller rink with her friends. Not everyone approved of the girls' choice of Sunday activities, though.

"On Sundays," Jean said, "often in the evening, my friends Dorothy Shunk and Wilma Rohland and I would take the streetcar to the Fairbank roller rink, or we would go to downtown Brownsville to the rink in Snowdon Square operated by Della and Gray Minehart. There was a very religious lady named Mrs. Seanor who lived on Angle Street, and when we would go skating on Sundays, she would pray for us."

Some people, especially the older folks, chose to engage in quiet pastimes that they knew would pass muster with religious or civil authorities.

"When I lived in Republic, most Sunday afternoons found me reading the novel that was presented in magazine format in the Union-

town *Herald*,” recalled Mildred Winterhalter Keppel of Wheeling.

“My mother usually worked on her scrapbook in the afternoon,” commented former South Brownsville resident Hannah Fisher, “pasting in any event which she thought important from the newspapers.”

Swimming, picnicking, hiking, roller skating, or just reading were all popular Sabbath pastimes. Eventually, the time came when the blue laws were relaxed, and movie houses opened for business on Sundays.

“For years, none of the Brownsville theaters was open on Sunday,” explained Mary Dalson Wenick of Belle Vernon. “It was unthinkable to go to the movies on the Sabbath.”

But when Brownsville movie houses finally opened on Sundays, Mary didn’t let any grass grow under her feet.

“My sister Katy and I attended the first Sunday movie in Brownsville at the Strand Theater,” Mary told me. “It was *The Life of Louis Pasteur*, starring Paul Muni. My parents drove us to the theater and picked us up afterwards. We thought it was a great event!”

Some folks were more resistant than others to permitting their children to go to the movies on Sunday afternoon, but eventually even the strictest parents relented.

“The movies were open, but they were off limits to us on Sunday,” said Hannah Fisher, “until my brothers and my cousin Conway Keibler came in and announced that Conway had taken them to the movies. Since Conway was at the seminary [he later became a Methodist minister], not too much was said. My mother must have thought it was okay if Conway went with them!”

There was apparently a warm-up act before the feature film was played. Jerry Cramer explained, “On Sundays, the theaters opened at 1:00 p.m., and for a while Cohen’s Furniture Store had an amateur show at the Plaza from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m., before the movie began.”

As these folks have described, there were plenty of activities to spice up a Sunday afternoon, even in the days of the Sunday blue laws. However, one group of people did have a tough time engaging in its favorite activity on Sundays.

The blue laws put a severe crimp in the Sunday plans of would-be shoppers. Next, we look back at how times were different for those unfortunate folks who wanted to shop ‘til they dropped on a Sunday afternoon.

A DAY WITHOUT SHOPPING: COULD IT WORK TODAY?

The gleaming automobile cruised slowly up the street. From its radio blared a song with an insistent beat, a rhythm that loudly permeated the “patch.”

Kids in the neighborhood ran excitedly to the side of the road, where they stood and stared in wide-eyed admiration as the smiling driver passed by. One hand on the steering wheel, elbow jutting casually out the open window, the young man proudly piloted his polished coupe along the same streets where he had played as a child.

That pulsating music from the car's radio was not of the “rap” variety that one might hear today. There was no mistaking the throbbing rhythm reverberating from those speakers. It was a polka!

“On Sundays in the spring and summer during the late forties and early fifties,” explained Newboro native Jerry LaMonica of Dearborn Heights, Michigan, “young men who had gone to Cleveland to work came home for the weekend, driving their not-necessarily-new cars that they had finally earned enough money to purchase. The cars often sported fancy mud flaps with reflectors on them, a fox tail flying from the antenna, and an exterior sun visor. They would drive slowly down the road past all the houses with their radio tuned to the polka station, turned up as loud as it would go. All of us young kids thought, ‘Man, that guy is really doing great!’”

It was “cruising” fifties-style, and it was yet another great way to spend a Sunday afternoon in the era of Pennsylvania’s blue laws.

As we have seen, area residents managed to find plenty of satisfying Sunday activities, despite the restrictions imposed by Pennsylvania’s blue laws. One postwar phenomenon not yet mentioned was the steady stream of automobiles that clogged the roads from Cleveland to southwestern Pennsylvania on Friday nights. These curious caravans signaled the weekend homecoming of young men who had moved to Ohio to find work, but whose roots were still firmly planted in the neighborhoods of southwestern Pennsylvania.

“My parents moved to Cleveland before I was born,” recalled Jeanne Luda-Barrett of Columbia Station, Ohio, “and for years I remember traveling back to Brownsville every Friday night, rain or snow. On Sunday we would go to ten o’clock mass at St. Mary’s, then gather with relatives and friends outside the church to catch up on the week’s events.

“After church we walked to my grandmother Mary Luda’s house on Walnut Street for a hearty breakfast of bacon, eggs and toast. In the

afternoon we visited my mother's mother, Nellie Stiveson in Blainesburg, where we had an early dinner. Then we returned to Brownsville to pack, leaving at seven or eight for the long ride home.

"As crazy as this ritual sounds, there were many people from Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky who traveled 'back home' every weekend and holiday. They would even come back to shop for groceries or get medical care. In fact, although my parents lived in Ohio for nearly three years before I was born, my mother's doctor was still Dr. Klimoski at the old Brownsville General Hospital, and they timed things so that we would be in Brownsville when I was born."

Folks who came home planning to shop for groceries had to do so on Saturday because in those days, most stores were closed on Sundays.

"All of the major stores in Uniontown or Brownsville were closed on Sundays," commented Jerry LaMonica, "although many of the small family-owned grocery stores remained open."

"In Brownsville, A&P and Kroger's were closed on Sunday," added Brownsville native Jerry Cramer of Macomb, Michigan. "Only small grocery stores and one drug store were open, with Brown's, Reed's, and the other drug stores taking turns staying open on Sunday."

Was the Sunday closing of most stores an inconvenience? Not as much as you might think, suggested South Brownsville native Bonnie Bryan Magee of Erie.

"With the stores closed on Sundays," Bonnie explained, "one did not feel the frenzied urge to shop. Since most women were full-time housewives, they had the rest of the week to do errands and shop."

Why did the sixties and seventies see such a push for Sunday shopping? One major factor was undoubtedly the advent of the two-earner household, which found working moms scrambling to find time to do their shopping.

Another factor may have been the development of suburban shopping centers and improved highways, which attracted newly mobile shoppers who were no longer limited to riding the bus or streetcar into a small town. One could drive to wherever the stores were open. When suburban stores began to ignore the blue laws and open on Sundays, often without penalty, small town stores felt the competitive heat and did the same in a futile attempt to survive.

To be sure, the blue laws did not disappear quietly. Court challenges contending that the blue laws unconstitutionally promoted religious doctrine were often defeated. As recently as 1961, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that although the blue laws may have originated for religious reasons, the state nevertheless had a right to set aside a secular day of rest for the well-being of its citizens.

Were the Pennsylvania blue laws an unconstitutional “establishment of religion?” Were they merely a legislative gift to the weary workers of the commonwealth? Or were they both?

One Pennsylvania legislator debating the 1939 Pennsylvania blue laws said, “As I read this bill, I find nothing in it which is of a religious nature. The bill is prompted by the thousands of letters that we have all received in the Senate of Pennsylvania, asking us to do something for the men and women who work in the department stores.

“These people are not asking to go to church; they are asking for a day of rest. This is not a bill. It is rather an indictment of our civilization which makes this kind of legislation possible and necessary. It is too bad that business will not permit its employees to have a day of rest. It is too bad that we must legislate morals, as we may be doing in this bill.”

Those past legislative attempts to force businesses to “take a day off” have succumbed to the inevitable. The incessant corporate drive for profit has finally steamrollered efforts to set aside one day of the week to tend to home and family. Sunday blue laws have declined since the 1960s, and those that remain on the books are often ignored.

Now Americans can shop twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Of course, in order for businesses to be open on Sunday, a lot of people have to come to work. This past Easter Sunday, many area stores were open. I would speculate that of the employees who staffed them, many would have preferred spending the afternoon enjoying a special Easter dinner and relaxing with their friends and family.

I will be the first to admit that I often shop on Sundays. Could I forego Sunday shopping and accomplish my errands on some other day of the week? Of course. My occasional Sunday morning trip to the hardware store could often be avoided with better planning on my part, and the local home improvement center will still be there on Monday.

Just imagine. What if America reverted to its custom of a century ago and once more made Sunday a day when non-essential commercial enterprises, including entertainment, were required to be closed? What an interesting change of pace that would be. Could you get used to that?

Perhaps West Brownsville native Ross Snowdon put it best. Ross’s memory can carry him into the early decades of the previous century, well into the heyday of the blue laws.

“In 1927,” Ross told me, “there was no television. On Sundays, stores were closed, there were no sporting events, and no movie theaters were open. But we did know our neighbors.”

Ross paused, then placed this final stamp on the subject.

“How far we have come?”