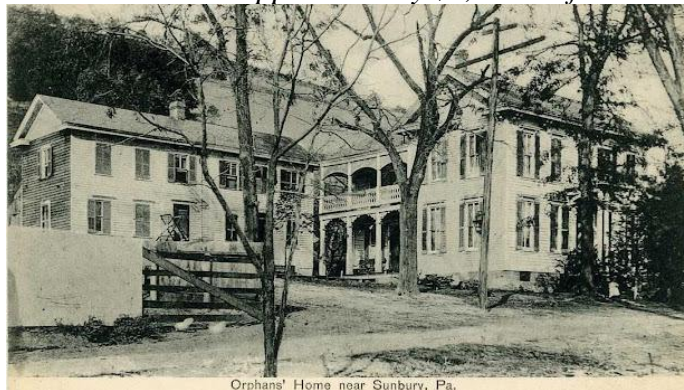


## The Wayback Machine led me to Mooseheart By Dani Crossley

In the fall of 1930, tragedy befell members of my husband's extended family. They resided in the northern part of Columbia County. Four children, ages 10, 8, 6, and 4, became fatherless from a hunting accident. Their father was only 30 years old at the time. Their mother, with no means of support, was unable to care for them. Meeting minutes from the Odd Fellows Orphans' Home of Central Pennsylvania (known as Mooseheart) in Sunbury included them in the 1931 listing of new Wards. As of the 1940 census, the younger two were still residing there. I set out to learn a little more about this orphanage.

If you are not familiar with Archive.org, you might want to investigate. Here is how the website is described on the internet: *The Wayback Machine (web.archive.org) is a digital archive of the World Wide Web. Since its launch in 2001, over 452 billion pages have been added to the archive. Users can enter a URL to view and interact with past versions of any website contained in the Archive, even if the site no longer exists on the "live" web.* It is fun to play with the Wayback Machine, but more importantly, many historical documents are archived there. Below are excerpts from a 51-page document published by Grit Publishing Company, Williamsport, PA, compiled in 1932 and entitled "Short History of The Odd Fellows Orphans' Homes of Central Pennsylvania." The Sunbury branch was in existence from 1897 to 1970.

*From December, 1896, to April, 1897, there were many anxious days for those upon whom the greatest responsibility seemed to rest. The money came in so slowly that we were not sure that the required amount would be on hand when needed, and sometimes the discouragements were so great that the leaders felt that they would be far better contented had they never taken hold of the enterprise. Some never lost heart, however, and by kind, cheerful words encouraged all and created within them a greater determination to succeed, regardless of the many hindrances that might be found in the way. The effort was crowned with success and April, 1897, found our Corporation in possession of \$6,000.00 worth of real estate and all paid for. Permission was now given to the Corporation by the Grand Lodge Officers to take up the work for which it was organized. Brother John L. Miller and his wife took charge of the property as soon as possession was given. We now had a farm but no money to purchase furniture for the house or equipment for the farm. We were very fortunate in having a brother at the head of the enterprise who had a little loose cash; so Brother Miller advanced approximately \$3,000.00 for these necessities.*



*The "old" Orphans' Home near Sunbury (1897-1912)*

The work for which it was organized was described as: *“for the purpose of devising ways and means for the erection and establishing of a Home for the maintenance of orphan children of deceased Odd Fellows, Indigent Odd Fellows and widows of Odd Fellows, supported by voluntary contributions, to be located at or near Sunbury, Northumberland County, PA.”*

*The Rebekah Lodges came to our assistance at the right time, as they always do, and furnished many things that were needed. During the first summer, owing to the small amount of money at our command, but little aid was given to the Matron. She did the general housework; milked the cows; did the scrubbing and the washing; did the baking for the Home; performed the duties of a farmer's wife in addition to looking after the comfort and welfare of Wards and the Home. ALL HONOR TO THIS NOBLE, GOD FEARING, UNSELFISH WOMAN.*

During the year 1897, sixteen children were admitted. *At the close of the year 1897 our total assets were \$11,559.86. We had an indebtedness of \$2,443.57, making our net assets \$9,116.29 and we thought we were becoming wealthy. This amount included \$540.98, which was the amount of money in the hands of the Treasurer.*

With a roll of 109 Lodges, twenty-four new members were elected to the Board of Directors. *The first contribution received from the Grand Lodge amounted to \$2,137.83; this was taken from the 25 cent per capita tax and was our share as apportioned under a rule governed by the aggregate number of weeks children were maintained in the Homes; this rule has been applied in all the past distributions. In the earlier days of this fund, each Orphan's Home received \$800 as a basis of expense, and the balance divided as per rule just cited. Later, however, this amount was changed to \$2,500.*

*During the year 1898 the Building Committee got busy and the capacity of the Home was doubled. A summer house was situated a few feet west and a little north of the main building. These buildings were connected and enlarged, making a very nice structure and ample for the accommodation of fifty children. A nicely proportioned school room was provided in the northeast corner of the main extension, now used as a play room by the kindergarten department of the Home except when necessity required this room was used as an extra sleeping apartment.*

*Miss Florence V. Stoner was the first school teacher. The cost of the furniture for the school room was \$75, and books and other necessities caused an expenditure of \$83.28. Brother Gramley recommended the purchase of an organ for the school. Lady Esther Rebekah Lodge No. 74 of Tunkhannock took the matter out of our hands by purchasing an organ and presenting it to the Home. Dear reader, this is the way many of the needs of our Home have been supplied. We recognize the Sisters as a blessing to our work.*

In the report for the year 1898, *“we sold to the Pennsylvania Railroad a piece of land around 60 feet by 176 feet upon which a nice station has been erected and named Orphanage. The old stop was about a quarter of a mile farther east and was called Bright. Many fruit trees and bushes were planted in 1898... When we purchased the farm the public road was close to the building and a deep water course extended between the barn and the summer house; stake-and-rider and post-and-rail fences were all over the property and were not in good condition. This year saw all the*

*old fences taken away; the public road changed to a point about 125 feet south of the old road and a driveway made to the new station from the new road.”*

From website *Valley Girl Views*:



*“The I.O.O.F operated an orphanage on Snyderstown Road in Sunbury, from 1897 to 1970. This is the “new” building, erected in 1912.”*

*“The orphanage had its own school, band, football team, baseball team, farm, chapel, and train station. While researching the orphanage, I read countless stories of many happy times at this facility. Those who attended there held an annual reunion, for decades, on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend.”*

In 1970, there were 14 wards at the orphanage. Unable to meet the increasing demands of the government standards, and faced with an unfathomable expense to put in a new sewer system, the I.O.O.F voted unanimously to close the orphanage.

Currently, the main location for the Mooseheart orphanage is near Chicago, Illinois. It has a 1000-acre campus and enrolls slightly more than 200 students from infants to 18. Kids don't pay to attend but need to be recommended and sponsored by a lodge. It is located 38 miles west of Chicago and houses and educates boys and girls. In 2015, Members of Susquehanna Valley's Moose lodges sponsored seven boys from Illinois for a week during the summer. The boys, all aged 10 to 12 and cared for by the Moose Lodge division Mooseheart, arrived in the Sunbury area after traveling 800 miles by car with their chaperones.

For a more complete story of the activities at the Home and lots more photos, visit <https://susquehannavalley.blogspot.com/2021/04/the-ioof-orphanage-in-sunbury-pa.html>.