

Marci McGuinness  
P. O. Box 111  
Chalk Hill, PA 15421  
724 710-2919

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## History, Mystery & Literary Notes

by Marci Lynn McGuinness

In 1984, the University of Pittsburgh Press published the book, *Youghiogheny*, Appalachian River, by Tim Palmer. On November 10, 2012, I ran into Tim on an airplane, giving us a chance to chat from Chicago to Pittsburgh. It has been 30 years since he did the research for his still popular book. I thought it would be interesting to take a look at some of the historical changes in Ohiopyle, since then, with the annual spring Buckwheat Supper coming up April 12 – 14.

Ohiopyle State Park has partitioned off a large part of the Falls area to build their new offices and visitor's center. This is not news or a surprise, but it got me thinking about all the buildings and landmarks removed since the *Youghiogheny* book hit the stands. One in particular was a youth hostel.

Tilghman "Tim" Mitchell's house sat on the west side of Route 381 just after you cross the bridge from the borough and over the railroad tracks. He and wife, Cora (Jackson), built the "rambling Victorian" in 1916. He was a well-to-do lumber man during the coal and coke boom. Tim Palmer interviewed Mitchell's son, Shelby, and published the following quote in his book.

"The Mitchell house at Ferncliff was a local mansion, testament to the wealth that could be taken from the old Appalachian forest. Shelby counts the rooms: 'Three in the attic, then seven upstairs, then downstairs there was one, two, three, and the kitchen, breakfast nook, the big billiard room and downstairs, and the wine cellar. Altogether I guess there were about twenty two. A stuffed deer head hung over one of the three fireplaces, and young Ed Jackson was afraid to go in that room.'"

Shelby built a twelve room home during the depression after a fire took the Victorian. He sold the house and property to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in 1961. The Pittsburgh Council of American Youth Hostels promptly remodeled it to sleep 22 overnight visitors.

I had written about the hostel in my *Explorer's Guide* after interviewing Manager, Bob Utz, in 1999. It was then an American Youth Hostel with 25 beds, a laundry, television, VCR, outdoor Bar B Q, and a kitchen stocked with everything from bread pans to spices. The common areas and dining room were comfortable and inviting. In their guest book I found an entry declaring that Utz should get an award for the most helpful, friendly hostel manager in the United States. *Hostels U.S.A.* rated them an "Extreme Value" with an A+ in hospitality and cleanliness. Beds started at \$9.00 per night and a couple private rooms were available. Only a few years later, I returned for a visit when I was living on the Chesapeake Bay, and it was gone.

I remembered the first time I saw the adjacent plot without the Ohiopyle Hotel. I was eight years old and in shock. Visitors today will never see Castle Rock, the Meadow Run Cabin, the Ohiopyle Hotel, the Hostel, the old bridge with its rope swing, Hostetler's Store, Front Street, or the homes of the many interesting characters who chose to settle near the Ohiopyle Falls. I remain thankful for having them embedded in my memory.

The old stone Ohiopyle schoolhouse one block east of the falls, is still standing and being put to good use. In addition to holding yoga classes, bingo, and spring and fall buckwheat suppers, it is home to two unique shops, a pizza joint, and a History Room. Check them out when you come up for the Buckwheat Supper. Backyard Gardens is a Buy Local store supporting locally produced products from pepper mustard to soap. I will be autographing my books and telling stories there on April 13, from 2 –

5p.m.

Tim Palmer's *Youghiogheny*, Appalachian River, is available at: [www.timpalmer.org](http://www.timpalmer.org). He has written 22 books on rivers, the environment, and adventure travel. One of the last sentences in his “Ohiopyle, The Old Days” chapter goes, “I think of changes coming to Ohiopyle and to everyplace, and it seems that there should be some connection between the old and the new.” I guess that is where I fit in.

*Marci Lynn McGuinness is the author of 27 books and several screenplays. Contact the author with your regional history stories at: 724 710-2919 or [shorepublictions@yahoo.com](mailto:shorepublictions@yahoo.com). More details: [www.uniontownspeedway.com](http://www.uniontownspeedway.com), [www.ohiopyle.info](http://www.ohiopyle.info), and [www.amazon.com/author/marcimcguinness](http://www.amazon.com/author/marcimcguinness).*