

# History of Ohiopyle

Ohiopyle means “white frothy water or beautiful falls” in the local Indian language (Shawnee). Youghiogheny means “river running in a roundabout course” in the local Indian language. Ohiopyle, Pennsylvania remains one of the country’s wonderful hideaways. The gem of Pennsylvania’s state park system has been through many changes as has the borough of Ohiopyle, in order to accommodate visitors and grow with the times. As this process has taken place, I have been snapping photographs so that the town’s history is at least partially recorded.

In *Yesteryear in Ohiopyle*, Volumes I and II, I depicted Ohiopyle and area folk, buildings and scenes of many years ago. *Yesteryear in Ohiopyle*, Volume III is a record of the 1990’s destruction of Castle Rock, Meadow Run Cabin, the Meadow Run Bridge, the old Western Maryland Railroad bridge and the reconstruction of local bridges and buildings. If you have the first two volumes of *Yesteryear in Ohiopyle*, you will want to add the third volume to your collection to keep a consistent log of Ohiopyle’s history through the decades.

In my book, *The Explorer’s Guide to the Youghiogheny River, Ohiopyle & S.W. Pennsylvania’s Villages*, published in 2000, I wrote a more complete history on Ohiopyle (1600 – 2000) than was included in the earlier books. It begins with details of George Washington’s travels through the area, his stopping above the falls and refusing to take his canoe over the rushing water, and Congressman Andrew Stewart’s development of Falls City here.

Ohiopyle had its heyday at the turn of the century with four hotels, and the Baltimore & Ohio railroad bringing passengers from Cumberland and Pittsburgh to lounge along our gorgeous river. These days are covered in the history taking you through the depression when Edgar Kaufmann bought the Bear Run property where he had Frank Lloyd Wright build the famous Fallingwater. Kaufmann also purchased Ferncliff Peninsula the Ohiopyle Hotel and granted them to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and virtually propelling us to where Ohiopyle is today.

This book is a continuation of all the Ohiopyle books I have written thus far. It shows you many of the major changes of the 1990’s to take Ohiopyle into the 21st century when it comes to bridges over its wonderful waterways. I feel the need to insure that the changes in this unique town and park are set down in history so that future residents and visitors have a record of the local people and Ohiopyle during this particular era of our high energy but slow keyed mountain river town.

What makes the Youghiogheny River so special? Below the falls it drops 90 feet in the first two miles and 13 feet per mile for the next five miles. There are 22 White Water rapids in 7 1/2 miles within the Youghiogheny River gorge. But I would say, beyond the obvious thrill of the wild ride down the river, it is the negative ions that get you. They make people feel invigorated, and the Youghiogheny oozes with them. Two million people pass through this fair burgh every summer season. They come to ride the river, stand by the falls and soak up the ions, eat ice cream and take walks on the many trails, ride on the Yough bike trail, swim, picnic, and relax by the river. Ohiopyle continues to make people feel good even after they return home.

Below is a partial history of Ohiopyle...

Stewart Township was named after the Honorable Andrew Stewart in 1855, because the Congressman put his money where his heart was in the early days of Falls City (Ohiopyle). He bought up thousands of acres in the mountains, but it was the lush Ferncliff Peninsula that intrigued him!

After a detrimental flub by the Whig nomination chairman cost Stewart the office of Vice President of the United States, President Taylor paid a visit to Uniontown. He arrived at the Clinton House Hotel on February 21, 1849 where hundreds gathered to greet him. Andrew Stewart built the Clinton House and lived there for many years before it was turned into a hotel. Was it here that the President offered

Stewart the office of Secretary of the Treasury and was turned down? I have no information to confirm this yet, but I have a hunch that is why he made the trip to Uniontown. Taylor soon died and Filmore took the Presidency as Stewart should have. But our Andrew stayed busy. During the remaining twenty three years of his life he kept in tune with Washington and worked very hard to bring the B & O railroad through Falls City (Ohiopyle). In addition to his business interests, he owned part of the Madison College in Uniontown and was President of the board. When they turned it into the Soldier's Orphan School during the Civil War, he set up \$10,000. worth of annual scholarships for hard working students. This went on until his death although the school was moved to Jumonville.

In 1862 Stewart replaced the covered bridge over the Youghiogheny River in Ohiopyle with a tall steel model. The ends of the covered bridge were steel and were hauled up to Cucumber Run. Here a bridge over the creek was built. This bridge was replaced in 1999/2000. As he served as President of the region's committee to bring the railroad to the area, he also drew up plans for Falls City's future. In 1868 a maintenance building was erected here for the railroad workers. What an exciting time for Falls City residents and the Stewarts! By now he was an elderly man, but his energy continued. His sons David, Albert and Col. Andrew worked with him, helping to run his vast estate. In 1871 the railroad came through Falls City and the Stewarts turned a huge barn into the three-story Ohiopyle Hotel. It sat on the immediate north side of the B&O train station here. A general store was also opened in the hotel building. Stewart was ready for the flow of traffic and industry the railroad would bring. This same year Stewart built the wooden Meadow Run Bridge, making Falls City more accessible. On July 16, 1872 the Honorable Andrew Stewart passed away and left his family his vast holdings referred to as the Stewart Estate. He was eighty two years old, a long life at that time. I believe that after he succeeded in bringing the railroad here, he was able to relax knowing his sons would carry on with his plans to make Falls City a travel destination of recognition. After the estate was settled, his widow sold Stewart's Row in Uniontown and the Fayette Springs Hotel (Stone House) on the National Road.

By 1879 the Stewarts built the four story Ferncliff Hotel on the 100 acre Ferncliff Peninsula. It was the picture of glamor with running water throughout boasting eight hundred electric lights, and the best in cuisine and service. An archway bearing its name led travelers from the B&O station down a long boardwalk. "Our porters meet all trains" was part of their ad then. The boardwalk led up to the hotel on the hill and down to the river where a bathhouse, bowling alley, and pavilion were built for the enjoyment of patrons. "Western Pennsylvania's Outing Resort" had a dining room that sat 150, hot and cold baths with iron and sulfur water, tennis courts, a baseball diamond, fishing, bathing, and picnicking.

There were reading and reclining chairs throughout the woods in addition to a croquet court, many swings, and refreshment tents. The Ferncliff Hotel overlooked the Ohiopyle Falls and the Cucumber Falls and Meadow Run Slides were within close walking distance. The town of Falls City could be seen from Lover's Leap, an overlook on the Ferncliff side of the falls. The Spoke and Hub Works, Fayette Tannery, Planning, Grist & Saw Mills, Thomas Potter's Coal Mine, and the Falls City Shook Factory could be viewed from above. Wooden steps led down the cliff to the falls where visitors could enjoy the river. Surrounded by water, the peninsula offered both a relaxing and energetic atmosphere with all the modern conveniences of the great hotel. Other than a few small cabins, the hotel was the only building ever constructed on the Ferncliff Peninsula.

The Coal and Coke Boom was underway and the Youghiogheny River Gorge, mined and timbered. Throughout the next decade, stores, liveries, and businesses were erected and the population grew to eight hundred-the most who have ever resided here! In 1891, Falls City's name was changed to Ohiopyle and the town was incorporated in to a borough. Ohiopyle means beautiful falls and white frothy water in the local Indian tongue. This same year a law was imposed carrying a fine of \$5.00 - \$25.00 for swearing or taking the Lord's name in vain.

At the turn of the century Ohiopyle boasted four hotels: The Ferncliff Hotel, the Ohiopyle House, Dr.

Brady's Boarding House, and the Ranier Hotel. Passenger trains brought travelers from far and wide keeping the hotels over booked. Many residents and farmers rented extra rooms to weekend guests and times were good.

This time, from the moment the railroad came to town in 1871, to the great depression of the 1930's, were six decades of prosperity. In 1903 the Stewarts tore down and rebuilt the Ohiopyle Hotel. Both their hotels were thriving and they had been building houses and stores in Ohiopyle and selling them and selling lots. I have yet to find out why they never built the subdivision their father had son Albert design. His son, Colonel Andrew Stewart died in 1903. With William dying heroically at sea, Fannie losing her life as a baby, Elizabeth passing in 1894, and David Shriver Stewart in 1897, Albert was the only child of the Congressman left to carry on his estate. Albert lived until 1916. The Stewarts had owned two hundred acres here-the entire town and the peninsula. Most of the buildings and houses were built by them. They gave the town the "Green" where the playground area is and the land where the fire hall sits. This was originally given to the Presbyterian Church but the church has long been gone.

The Brady Boarding House burnt down in 1916 along with Tom Flemming's Store and several homes. These were located across the Youghiogheny from the town and across the street from the Ohiopyle Hotel. Men doused the hotel with water and saved it. The Downer Excursion House also burned this year.

In 1903 Tim Michell and his crew were cutting timber off of Ferncliff. They built a swinging bridge to get the logs across the river. Cable track was laid on the bridge and horses hauled wagon loads of lumber across the river! Since this is the year the Ohiopyle Hotel was rebuilt and son Col. Andrew died, I assume they were clearing land for their 337 lot village. I don't yet know why Albert never went on with things. I do know he did no building on the peninsula after his last brother died. All the Stewart's Ohiopyle property was sold off through the years.

The Ohiopyle Lumber Company opened in 1905 which became the Kendall (Samuel and Jacob) Lumber Company in 1915. They built a 26 mile narrow gauge tram road from Meadow Run to West Virginia to haul logs. They logged four thousand acres south and east of Sugarloaf Mountain. They worked this mill on Meadow Run into the early 1920's.

The wooden Meadow Run Bridge was replaced in 1919 with the one that was recently replaced. By the late 1920's many owned automobiles (which had a hard time climbing mountains) and the tourist trade fell off. The 1930's brought the great depression and times became hard here in Ohiopyle. The Ferncliff hotel was abandoned and the 1936 Johnstown Flood destroyed the Big Gristmill at the falls. Even the jailhouse and meat packers were washed away. Many moved away to find work. Moonshine stills and Speak Easies became the norm because mountain spring water was plentiful...and the Youghiogheny River kept flowing on.

From Moonshine to Mainstream...

My mother grew up in Ohiopyle in the 1930's and 1940's and tells me she never noticed that it was hard times here. They were perfectly happy and ate well. Helen Hochstetler Snyder, who graduated with the Class of 1938, wrote the following poem about that era:

Ohiopyle Memories By Helen Hochstetler Snyder

As I grew up in Ohiopyle in post-depression days,  
I heard many tales of what it was like when Ohiopyle was in its "hey-day".  
How excursions came from Pittsburgh where city folks did dwell  
How they spent their summer holidays at the grand Ferncliff Hotel  
There was a boardwalk, so they said, winding through the park  
And how I wished I could have been there. It would have been a lark!  
The good old "Yough" was our playground and every spring we'd shiver,  
Trying to be first to take a dip in that sparkling, flowing river.  
Things have changed, and once again,

Ohiopyle's the place where people come from far and near and down the rapids race  
My childhood home is standing still and memories abound  
When I go back to Ohiopyle it's the greatest place around!

In 1906 the Kendall Lumber Company harnessed the water power at the Ohiopyle Falls to produce electricity. They not only ran their saw mill and plant, but the lights of the town as well. Residents will tell you, that when the river froze over in the winter, lights would dim and finally go out until someone went down to the freezing Youghiogheny and broke the ice up. Folks argued about whose turn it was, for the weather was atrocious and no one was anxious to go out to the roaring ice-laden Yough. The depression hit and many businesses failed. The Ferncliff Hotel ran through the late thirties and was abandoned, but the Ohiopyle Hotel continued it's rein through 1964.

Just three miles away, in 1936-38, Edgar J. Kaufman (Kaufman's Department Stores) was building the now famed Falling Water. Kaufman employed many locals in the construction of his new Frank Lloyd Wright masterpiece. He ran a full time greenhouse and dairy farm on the acreage and some of his main workers lived in cottages there. Many saw mills and mines were still in business, but not in the capacity that they had produced during the coal and coke boom. Some men were hired to build the Youghiogheny River Dam and the Pennsylvania Turnpike, but many turned to moonshining and running speak easies to make a living.

Lillian McCahn worked at the Western Maryland Railroad Station in Ohiopyle for 25 years. This station was built in 1911 by the river where the Baptist Church once sat. It is today's visitor's center. In 1948 McCahan wrote to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy asking them to buy the Ferncliff Peninsula to save it as a natural area. She knew of the rare southern plants and wanted to see it used as a park for picnicking. The conservancy did not have the funds to buy the 100 acre Youghiogheny paradise. Three years later she was in a panic as then owner Alex Meade wanted to sell the peninsula for \$35,000. His prospective buyer intended to build an amusement park. She contacted, Dr. William Mayer-Oakes, a Carnegie Museum anthropologist whom she had met in Ohiopyle, and he agreed that this was an important piece of property to conserve. He discussed the situation with M. Graham Netting of the Recreation, Conservation, and Park Council. Along with Charles Lewis from the conservancy, they approached Edgar J. Kaufmann. In 1951 he bought the Ferncliff Peninsula and the Ohiopyle Hotel from Alex Meade for \$40,000. He then turned them over to the conservancy, unaware that he had just made the first move toward what would become Ohiopyle State Park, white water haven.

Around 1910, Ohiopyle residents began adding bathrooms to their houses. Up until that time, everyone used outhouses. The sewage ran through open ditches down the alleys to drains that took it right into the river. Most people had chickens and some say Ohiopyle smelled real bad between the sewage and the chicken do-do. At this time high school students took the train to Connellsville for their education.

Down close to the river along the falls area, there was a road called Front Street or Commercial Street. Stores, homes, and blacksmith shops lined this lane.

In 1958 the conservancy announced its intention to preserve the Youghiogheny River Gorge from logging and mining. The Melon Trust Fund awarded the conservancy \$100,000. to plan and develop a park in Ohiopyle, and to acquire land. They hired Community Planning Services in 1959 to analyze the land here and recommend boundaries for their dream park. The Youghiogheny River Gorge and all river front property became a priority. Borders extended upriver to Ram Cat where the Laurel Hill starts and south to Bruner Run. Sugarloaf Mountain's north slope was included because of the wonderful

slopes for skiing, along with Baughman Rock's scenic overlook. Tharpe Knob ridge on Kentuck Mountain was included for camping, a possible golf course, overlooks, and Jonathan Run. Meadow Run,

with its natural rock water slides and falls went into the plan, also. That same year, the West Penn

Power Company gave the conservancy its riverfront property that ran from the Route 381 bridge to Meadow Run. In 1960 they announced that they would build a parking lot, trail, and picnic area at the Ohiopyle Falls.

In 1961, Mrs. Albert Fraser Keister sold 589 acres to the conservancy including one mile of Cucumber Run, the Cucumber Falls, and two miles of river frontage. Mrs Keister did this with the stipulation that the park be called "Keister Park" and for a while it was, but when the land was sold to the state for a state park, this promise was not kept. It was around this time that the conservancy and the state agreed that all the land here that the conservancy acquired would be sold to the state at cost.

Maurice Goddard was appointed Secretary of the Department of Forests and Waters in the mid 1950's. Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr., whose father designed New York City's Central Park, surveyed the state's recreation needs and recommended that Ohiopyle be park designated. So, when Charles F. Lewis approached Goddard promoting the Ohiopyle area for conservation, he listened.

In 1962, at the dedication of the Keister acquisitions (now totaling 1,000 acres), Goddard announced his dream to "create a full scale state park here at Ohiopyle-one which will be almost unmatched in natural scenic beauty anywhere in Pennsylvania." To acquire more land, Goddard began Project 70 with the goal of opening an 18,500 acre park here by 1970. Ironically, \$70 million dollars were allocated

in 1963 to buy lands in Ohiopyle for a major state park. Goddard led the team that condemned the property belonging to Ohiopyle residents to make their park. He said he hated to condemn land but was doing it for the common good. This created hard feelings between the state park, conservancy, and the locals that still exists today. Homeowners began getting letters saying, "Your home will be bought." They were no longer asking to purchase, they forced the people who loved their homes to sell at rock bottom prices. Most could not afford another place and had to move in with relatives or buy a much more modest home. Fights ensued, but the government won.

On Friday, November 13, 1964, just after the Ohiopyle Hotel was remodeled by the conservancy, someone burnt it down. The fire was started on the porch during a severe drought. It seemed to be a local's way of saying, "You may get our land, but you will never take our hotel." The hotel and tavern was first built in 1871. My grandmother ran the place until 1963. Seventeen homes and buildings were destroyed along the area where the falls overlook and park were created. The Ferncliff Hotel was also torn down and burnt, but you can see its remains still on the Ferncliff Peninsula.

In 1958, Lance Martin ran the Youghiogheny River's rapids as an Explorer Scout in an Army surplus raft. Five years later, he, wife Lee, and friend Karl Kruger began taking people down the lower Youghiogheny for money. This marked the birth of the biggest white water rafting Mecca in the world.

In 1968, 5,000 people were taken on guided tours down the river. This figure rose to 95,000 for the season of 1978 and to 150,000 by 1982. Lance pioneered Wilderness Voyaguers, one of four guided rafting companies in Ohiopyle today. Now his children run the business and are proud of what their father did for this borough.

In the late 1960's Route 381 was rerouted and Front Street removed. Sewage and water plants were built for the borough giving us city water and stopping the continual pollution of the Yough. I remember

how happy my grandmother was when she got city water, and we are thankful for that today. This was one of the ways the conservancy tried to ease the local's anger, but the people who were run from their homes no longer lived in the borough and could not benefit.

The following poem was written by Lillian McCahan:

Bathrooms

The New York news writer of note

Thought he was funny when he wrote

How many hundreds of thousands the Government figures proved must be unwashed

What else could one assume when not one of them had a room with plumbing?

My dear fellow pray, how could they bathe without a way?

I'd like to show him my washstand

Bowls, pitcher, towels always on hand;

All facilities so I may take my bath, Smarty, everyday.

Like most small villages, the general store is the center of social activity. For Ohiopyle, it has always been Holt's (today's Fall's Market). Thomas and John Holt were brothers who brought their families here from Pittsburgh for the clean air. Thomas was ailing from black lung disease. In 1895 John built a store by the bridge along Front Street. This did so well that in 1918-19 he constructed the large brick store that Leo Smith runs today with his family. At that time the store was downstairs and Dodges and Chevys were sold upstairs. In later years Bob and Charles Holt opened stores next to each other. They were not on good terms and never set foot in one another's stores! Charlie's son Bill later bought the store and ran it for decades until selling to Leo Smith in 1975. Falls Market remains Ohiopyle's social gathering place along the Youghiogheny River.