

— BUHL PARK —

EST. 1915

Who We Are

LOOKING BACK ON BUHL LEGACY AND THE MANY WAYS
IT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE FOUNDATION OF OUR EXISTENCE



THE LEGACY OF FRANK AND JULIA BUHL



The story of Julia Forker and Frank Henry Buhl begin with a “Once Upon A Time...”

Though it has been told time and time again, it’s like a favorite fairy tale fascinating, flavorful, even fanciful-encircled in an aura of legend with whispers of magical charm. Like a prince and a princess, the Buhl’s reigned supreme from their castle-like fortress atop “Sharon Hill” as Shenango Valley’s first family.

“All that a man gets out of life is what he puts into it” - F.H Buhl

FRANK HENRY BUHL

Frank H. Buhl came to Sharon, PA in 1867 after graduating from Yale University, and went to work for the Sharon Iron Works. His father, who had settled in Detroit, was a founding partner of that company. Frank worked at Sharon Iron Works for five years before becoming plant manager and then superintendent. Buhl returned to Detroit in 1878 to take charge of the Detroit Cooper and Brass Rolling Mill. He stayed there until 1887 when he returned to Sharon to once again oversee operations at Sharon Iron Works. His father, Christian H. Buhl, had assumed full ownership of the Sharon factory, which by 1888 had become the largest plant in Mercer County, employing some 700 workers. Buhl Steel Co. was formed in 1896 with Frank H. Buhl as its president. Three years later, Buhl Steel was absorbed by the National Steel Company. After the U.S. Steel absorbed both National Steel and Sharon Steel, Buhl retired from the industry.



CHARISMATIC PAIR

Shortly after returning to Sharon, Buhl married Julia Forker, the daughter of a prominent Sharon couple. Forker had come to Sharon from Mercer when she was just six years old.

They never sat cloaked in golden robes upon a jeweled throne, but the “wishes” they granted and lives they touched with an outpouring of generosity, earned Mrs. Buhl the title of “fairy godmother” and Mr. Buhl the respect due to a kindly king. What a grand pair they must have been: a gentle Julia, loved by the community not for her wealth but for her charming simplicity; Frank Buhl, whose sterling character has been recorded in his deeds and legacy to the entire community.

For young Julia, it was the beginning of a new lifestyle in her beloved Shenango Valley. But Frank, who has already risen to fame as a great industrialist, was anticipating moving on. Mr. Buhl wanted to continue his empire building elsewhere. When he confided his plan to his bride, she refused to listen. “I love Shenango Valley too much and I do not wish to leave here”.

Although stories from the past fail to tell much of Frank and Julia's personal life, little anecdotes have been passed along and give a good indication of their personalities. Dashing Frank Buhl, big and broad-shouldered, cut a fine figure about town and his thick, curly white hair made him recognizable from afar. He exuded confidence but shunned all ostentation and derived great pleasure in giving to others. Julia, always gracious, and notable modesty did not step in Frank Buhl's footsteps. She was his partner in marriage and his partner in life. Stories say he often sought her advice in making decisions which have influenced the success story of the community.

BUHL FARM

Buhl Farm Park was the creative idea of millionaire industrialist Frank H. Buhl in the early 1900's. Wanting to share their wealth with others, Mr. Buhl and his wife did so in their hometown.



Between 1907 and 1911, he purchased seven different parcels of farm land in Hickory Township (now known as the City of Hermitage) bordered by the Borough of Sharon (now known as the City of Sharon) and the Borough of Sharpsville. The parcels combined made up an area totaling 262.66 acres.

Over a period of four years, planning and strategizing took place between architect Charles W. Hopkinson of Cleveland, Ohio and Frank Buhl to develop the land into a beautiful outdoor recreational park known as Buhl Farm. Mr. Buhl preferred it be called a "farm" instead of a "park" because at that time the connotation that went along with a park invoked images of thrill rides, games of chance, and entrance fees. According to Buhl, the Farm was, ***"For the proper use, benefit and enjoyment of the public generally, and more especially the residents of this community, as a playground and place of recreation."***

Frank Buhl planned a beautiful recreation center where, without money and without price, people could enjoy recreation year-round. It included an eleven acre lake with a sandy beach; a two-story recreational center known as the Casino; a picnic shelter; a picnic grove with benches, tables, and swings; a playground with the latest in recreational equipment; a band stand; ten tennis courts; an athletic field with a grandstand, and a golf course.



In 1912, W. H. Way of Mayfield Country Club in S. Euclid, Ohio prepared the layout of Buhl Farm Golf Course. He was paid \$30.46 for the project. In 1963, an additional 107.72 acres known as the Thornton Farm, located adjacent to the golf course, was deeded to the Trustees. Buhl intended for this course to be free of charge for anyone wishing to play. Subsequently several of the original holes were redesigned and a driving range was added. In the 1990's, the Trustees conveyed 12 parcels of land from the Thornton Farm area totaling 60.62 acres, leaving just over 276 acres comprising Buhl Farm Park.



Also part of the original park layout was an 8" water well some 500' deep with water standing 45' from the surface. Indications were that it could furnish 100,000 gallons in 24 hours. This 11-acre lake provided swimming and fishing in the summer and ice skating in the cold winter months.



The Casino, a place for social gathering, became another famous landmark in Buhl Park. The building was slightly renovated in 1936 and again in 1985 with the addition of new storm sewers and minor repairs to the columns. It underwent a total renovation in 2010 at a cost of nearly \$3.5 million, all while maintaining its structural authenticity.

Four miles of roads were constructed in along with lamp posts. A total of fifty-two, were installed every 100-120 yards along much of the roadway to ensure a safe environment after dark. The same roads and lamp posts continue to be maintained today.

The "arched" concrete bridge over Lake Julia has become a notable park landmark.



An athletic field was constructed with Van Dorn Iron Works Company, Cleveland, Ohio providing a grandstand with a seating capacity for 1000 at a cost of \$6,367. The grandstand was later moved to an area at the southeast corner of the park. That field proved to be unplayable at times so the baseball field was moved to a drier area of the park and the grandstand was reconstructed into a picnic pavilion utilizing brick, wood, stone, and concrete in 1936. This structure is now known as Shelter #2.

The Activities Building was designed in 1940 by Edwin S. Hanna, architect, and constructed by Wallace & Carley. The building was originally designed for use by the Kindergarten Program. It was updated in 1985 through a grant from the Westinghouse retirees.

Much of Buhl Farm Park is the product of landscape architect M. H. Horvath and of internationally known landscape architect, George Rettig.



The Gatehouse, designed by E. S. Hanna, was built in 1933 for use as a home for the park superintendent and his wife. Specifications and blueprints called for “oak floors and beams, copper gutters, stone front, and an extra heavy red asphalt shingled roof over a layer of 15# slater’s felt.” The Gatehouse still maintains its original appearance today.

In 1936, a swimming pool was added in the park along with locker rooms attached to the Casino building. It was upgraded in 1991. A new pool house was constructed in 2005 adjacent to the pool.



During the time period of 1911-1915, a total of \$385,017.69 was spent on the Farm. It November, 1915m it was deeded to the F.H. Trustees for the sum of \$1.00. Frank and Julia established an endowment for the upkeep, maintenance and improvement of their beloved Farm.

INTERESTS WORTH REPEATING

Mr. Buhl's interests are history, but they are worth repeating. While his generosity touched the folks here, he also stretched his hands across the world. He underwrote a loan for a railroad in Manilla. He and Peter L. Kimberly established the Twin Falls Land and Water Co. in Idaho and built a dam across the Snake River in 1903, the world's third largest irrigation project. Buhl, Idaho, stands as a tribute to him today.

Mr. Buhl also played a major role in the founding of a town in Minnesota. Even in death, Frank didn't forget the people of the Shenango Valley, or the world. He left \$2 million to the suffering war orphans in Northern France and Belgium. Today, in France, there is a Buhl Pavilion in the Sanatorium Edith Caveli-Marie de Page War Memorial Hospital that stands in tribute to his generosity.

FIRST FAMILY

For more than 20 years, Mr. and Mrs. Buhl served as first family of the Shenango Valley. Then, in the summer of 1918, the community was plunged into sorrow when they lost their leading citizen, Frank H. Buhl passed away.

Mrs. Buhl, who had joined her steel-king husband in all his affectionate gestures toward the valley, continued to fulfill his dreams. She knew her husband believed in spending his money where he made it. She too had a love for charitable work and maintained the Mercer County Branch of the International Sunshine Society as her pet project.

BENEFACCTIONS CONTINUE

Julia Buhl helped ease families financial burdens during the Great Depressoin through her Sunshine Society. The Buhl Hospital, named after Mr. Buhl's father, Christian H. Buhl, built in 1896, carried a deficit on its ledgers for many years. It was Mrs. Buhl who saw the books were cleared.

She was a social worker of sorts before the term was popular. Mrs. Buhl dedicated herself to the Shenango Valley and helped make life easier and happier for thousands. She obtained much pleasure in seeing her good deeds make people happy. A memory recalled at her death was the sight of her beaming happily as she enjoyed the free concerts and features of Buhl Farm.

Even after an accident when she suffered a fracured leg and was unable to walk, her good deeds continued. She was chauffeured about town daily. She often braved the brisk weather to visit a favorite site, the lovely pond in Buhl Farm that today bears her name.



Shortly before her death in 1936, Mrs. Buhl acquired the Buhl Armory on South Sharpville Avenue to offer the same type of facility for the women of the valley that they Buhl Club provided for boys and men.

When she died of a heart attack on the late afternoon of June 3rd, 1936, gloom paled the community. The woman, who had spent her entire lifetime performing kind deeds, touching souls of so many, was gone. Following her death, a memorial garden in Buhl Farm was established in her honor. Within the garden area, an abundance of flowering trees and shrubs were strategically planted along a winding walkway. A small pond graces an area of the garden displaying a fountain in the center. The concrete wall at the entrance was built to match the design of the bridge over Lake Julia and remains today.

The man and woman who loved high on “Sharon Hill”, who journeyed twice around the world, left their biggest mark on the Shenango Valley. Here, their philanthropies are not measured in dollar and cents, but in civic pride and respect for all they inspired.

The legacy left behind by Frank and Julia Buhl has been unmatched in our area, and their idea of bringing recreational and cultural benefits to community residents has been a blessing. Buhl Farm Park has been known as the gem of the community, a place for peaceful enjoyment year-round.

It continues to thrive today in building a healthy, happy and connected community.



