

Back in the Country...
Bell Acres Stories
 By Debby Rabold

No Sunday Selling to Be Permitted in Sewickley, Is the Order.

Sunday Blue Laws

It wasn't that long ago when working, shopping or attending a Sunday sporting event, concert or movie was illegal. Sunday was legislated as a day of rest and prayer for Christians and non-Christians alike. Originating in 17th century New England, Blue Laws, named for the color of paper they were printed on, prohibited "worldly employment or business" as well as "gaming, hunting, shooting, sport and diversion." The only exceptions were for "necessity and charity." Puritan influence spread throughout the nation as states adopted variations of the laws. One of the most widely adopted prohibited Sunday sales of alcohol.

Restrictions were challenged, modified, ignored and upheld until there was a crazy quilt of what items could or could not be sold and what activities were or were not permitted. Enforcement was uneven. Why, for example, would it be legal to play golf on Sunday, but not baseball or football? Why could one hunt and fish on private land, but not in public places?

In 1911, Sewickley's police chief sent a letter to borough merchants threatening arrest if they made Sunday sales. Only the purchase of a Sunday newspaper was allowed. There would be no Sunday ice cream, candy or tobacco sales, causing both merchants and residents much unhappiness.

Undertaker must rest on Sunday!

"The blue laws, forbidding Sunday selling or labor on the Sabbath day, will be stringently enforced. Notice to that effect was sent last night to all business people of the [Sewickley] borough by [the chief of police]. The order was issued by the burgess. Even the paid singers in the church choirs of Sewickley have been notified that they must discontinue their labors on the Sabbath day.

Among others who received notice that he cannot conduct his business on Sunday was J W Marlatt, as undertaker. Any funerals scheduled for Sunday must be postponed until Monday...Those who disobey the order, the notice declares, will be severely prosecuted." (From the **Daily Post** 16 March 1911)



While it is now possible to enjoy Sunday concerts, they were once illegal. In April 1927, members of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra played their first Sunday concert to an appreciative and defiant audience of 3,500 in the Syria Mosque, after which charges were brought against several individuals.

MOSQUE IS PACKED AS FIRST SUNDAY SYMPHONY IS PLAYED

In 1933, both the Philadelphia Eagles and Pittsburgh Pirates (future Steelers) franchises joined the National Football League, but Pennsylvania Blue Laws prevented them from playing Sunday games. In Pittsburgh, games were played Wednesday nights at Forbes Field. On the ballot in that year's statewide general election were two important questions. One was for the repeal of the 18th "Prohibition" Amendment while the other would decide if Sunday afternoon baseball and football games would be permitted between the hours of 2:00 and 6:00.

**SUNDAY BASE BALL
REGARDED AS MENACE**



By a large majority, Pennsylvania voted to repeal both the Prohibition Amendment and the ban on Sunday baseball and football. Art Rooney's new football team was scheduled for a Sunday game before the new law allowing Sunday play took effect. Wanting to avoid demonstrators and a police raid, Rooney (pictured left) discovered that only the Allegheny County sheriff and the police superintendent were authorized to prevent the game from taking place. With one out of town that weekend and the other given complimentary tickets, the game was played without incident.

Despite the Blue Laws being modified for sports, they were still being enforced for other activities. In the summer of 1934, police raided the Glenwillard dance hall on a Sunday night. Dancers fled through doors and windows. Those not able to escape were rounded up by the police. While women were released with a warning, the men and musicians were taken to Sewickley to post bond for a hearing.

**No 'Ifs, Ands or Buts'
Concerning Enforcement
Of Sunday Blue Law**

In the 1950s, Pennsylvania enacted a new law prohibiting the Sunday sales of automobiles and in 1967, the Pennsylvania

Supreme Court upheld the legality of the state's Blue Laws. In 1976, Pennsylvania Superior Court ruled that municipalities could prosecute stores for Sunday sales in a case involving McCandless, Ross and O'Hara townships and grocery chains A&P and Kroger. Two years later, the State Supreme Court ruled Pennsylvania's Blue Laws unconstitutional because they were unenforceable, however, the laws were not formally repealed.

Pa. Blue Laws Are Abolished

How they voted...

Allegheny County overwhelmingly voted to repeal the 18th Prohibition Amendment and modify the state's Blue Laws to allow Sunday baseball and football.

Votes in favor of Sunday sports....

Edgeworth	350	to	101
Glenfield	247	to	74
Haysville	48	to	8
Leet	189	to	50
Leetsdale	207	to	98
Osborne	92	to	47
Sewickley Borough	1287	to	476
Sewickley Twp. (Bell Acres)	72	to	32
Sewickley Heights Twp. (Sewickley Heights & Sewickley Hills)	191	to	96

Franklin Twp. (Franklin Park) was one of the few municipalities to vote against legalizing Sunday sports by a vote of 216 to 193. Not until 1955 did township residents allow Sunday movies at the Brookside Drive-In by a vote of 604 to 227.