


**NOW
&
AND THEN**


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Shenango House, Sharon, Pa.

The Shenango House, opened just after the Civil War, was a three-story, 86-room hotel at East State Street and Railroad Avenue in downtown Sharon. After it was gutted by a fire on Feb. 25, 1928, the top story was removed, ground-floor level was lowered and it was renovated into the Boyle business block with a new beige, terracotta facade.

The Shenango House, Sharon's premier 19th-century lodging establishment

By John Zavinski

LONG BEFORE THERE WAS the Shenango Inn, the Radisson Hotel, or Tara – A Country Inn, the Shenango Valley's leading place of fine lodging was the Shenango House in Sharon.

It stood at East State Street and Railroad Avenue. According to a 1950 Herald story, the Shenango House was built in 1867-68 by C.G. Carver, M.C. Trout, T.J. Porter and Jesse Reeves. It had 86 rooms and reportedly cost \$150,000, a huge sum at the time. It existed for the last couple years that the Erie Extension Canal operated; the canal ran along the eastern side between it and what is today Helen Freed's dress shop.

Besides elaborate furnishings, the hotel boasted gas lighting and running water on all three floors. The water flowed through wooden pipes a couple blocks down East State Street from a spring behind the Forker home, which was east of the current Buhl Recreation Center.

The Shenango House became a center of community activities, then fell on lean years with periods of suspended operations. John Boyle bought it and ran it from 1890 until his death in 1909. Eventually his son Thomas ran it, along with the nearby Gable Hotel on Railroad Avenue.

Fire gutted the Shenango House on Feb. 25, 1928, leaving only the out-



John Zavinski/Life & Times

The Boyle Building today has storefronts on the ground floor and apartments above.

ter walls. It was rebuilt as a two-story business block with apartments above. You can still see the original window outlines on the sides.

Humorist Mark Twain is said to have stayed at the Shenango House. A Sharon Telegraph account after his death in 1910 put the date at 1873. However, Twain scholars who have stitched together lists of his itineraries say he was here March 20, 1869, at the end of a lecture tour just before the publication of his nonfiction travelogue, "The Innocents Abroad"

An unnamed "aged resident of the city," told the newspaper that Twain

spoke at Thompson's Hall over George Dresch's wholesale liquor store and that Twain had breakfast brought to his room and ate it while lying in bed.

The demise of the Shenango House left the town with other, smaller hotels such as the Gable, the Carver House on West State Street, the Standard (Colonial) Hotel on Chestnut Street, and the Old Tymer and Sharon hotels on North Railroad.

Two decades later, the void for quality lodging was filled when leaders got together and built a community-owned hotel, the Shenango Inn. It opened in November 1950 and will be the subject of next month's column. ♦