

# JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

## Quick, Timely Reads On the Waterfront

### Shy Club: Bay Rat Dance Pavilion

By David Frew  
July 2023



*45-RPM records came with a large center hole so that either special adapters for a standard 78-RPM record player or individual plastic adaptors were required to play them.*

Some of us were hanging out with a few neighborhood girls one day when they suddenly began to discuss a musical program that they were designing. We guys were generally clueless, as far as the girls were concerned, but as they talked, we impolitely interjected ourselves into their conversation. We were very suave, of course, and we thought that we knew everything about music, so we carried on. Eventually we caught on to what they were doing. They were arranging a list of favorite songs but there were two caveats. (1) The list had to include an alternating

series of fast versus slow songs (for dancing). (2) And each song had to be one that either the girls or their friends possessed in the form of a 45-RPM record.

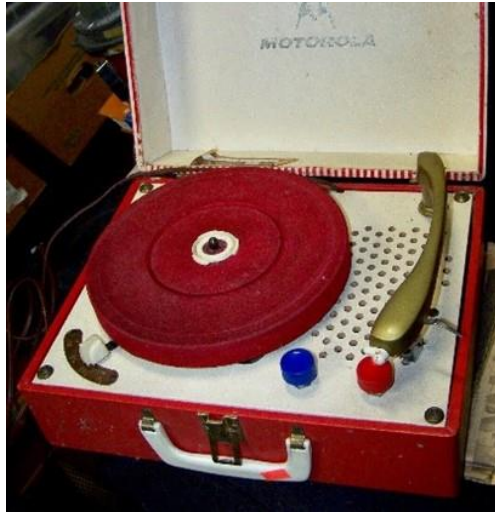
Eventually they explained that they had been charged with the important responsibility of designing the music for next Friday evening's dance at the SHY Club. Pretending to know exactly what SHY Club was, we wished them luck and returned to important activities like spitting on the sidewalk or making rude digestive sounds. Just one more example of the ways in which girls were a bit more mature than boys of the same general age, I suppose.

We did know our music, however. Back in those days, kids purchased popular recordings by the individual song and releases came with an "A" side and a "B" side. The A side of a 45-RPM record was supposed to be the popular song released by a musical artist, while the B side was generally a tune that nobody would pay attention to. There were exceptions, of course: Elvis Presley's "Hound Dog" from 1953, for example. Individual records were released in cardboard jackets that contained illustrations and photos of the recording artist. The artwork was limited by the small size of the package relative to 78-RPM records, which were the standard at the time. It was just before the new and revolutionary 33 1\3-RPM, long-play records emerged. But for us kids, 45 records were most popular.



*A typical snap-in adapter*

There was a problem playing the new, popular 45s, however. Those records came with a large, round-center hole that did not fit on the typical family record player. There were two ways to play them. Small plastic snap-in insets could be placed in each individual record, or a more expensive turntable adaptor could be purchased to fit over the center pin of a standard phonograph. At about the time that 45s became popular, small portable phonographs appeared. And most of them were specifically designed to play the smaller 45 records.



*A 1950s-era portable record player*

The mysteries of our conversations with the girls did not surround music or 45s. We knew all about them. But SHY Club? We were clueless. At first, we assumed that it was a place for less than outgoing people to go and we were repelled. Bay Rats were definitely not shy! Eventually, however, we figured it out. Someone's parents provided the intelligence. SHY was short for Sarah Hearn Youth, a club outreach offered by the neighborhood Presbyterian Church and aimed at middle-school kids. SHY Club offered a Friday night social event with dancing that was held in the church social hall just a few blocks south of us. A dance with actual girls? Suddenly we were "all in."

We were vaguely aware of weekly dances that were sponsored by neighborhood Catholic Churches, including St. Joseph Church on Sassafras Street (Wednesdays), as well as a Downtown YMCA dance on Saturdays. That event was called Y-ASTEC, an abbreviation that stood for several cooperating local high schools (Academy, Strong Vincent, Tech, East and Cathedral Prep). But those dances seemed a bit old for us. They were for high school kids. On the next Friday night, we showed up, paid our quarters for admission, listened to the music that the neighborhood girls had so carefully curated, and hung out along the sidewall, carefully avoiding the dance floor.

We continued to attend SHY Club dances for a few more years, almost learning to dance (but not very well) and enjoying the music. The Friday events were supervised by Andy Petersen, a swim coach from the YMCA, and we all got to know and like him. Andy turned out to be one of Erie's premier masters-level swimmers, winning state and national titles well into his 90s. Eventually, however, we shifted to the high school events. At the urging of Mr. Petersen, we drifted from SHY Club to the Saturday YMCA dances.

At the time that we were enjoying the Friday dances we had little appreciation for the fact that we were attending a Presbyterian Church function. As that reality began to sink in, those of us who were St. Andrew students were feeling more than a bit guilty for hanging around an actual “Protestant” church. Religion Classes at St. Andrew School emphasized the dangers of fraternizing with Protestants, and we would have been chastised if we had been outed.

We had absolutely no understanding of the historic importance of Sarah Hearn Memorial Church. The building was constructed in 1926 as a memorial to Sarah Loomis Brown Hearn. Her family members were pioneer settlers in North East, Pennsylvania, where they were in the tavern business. Sarah’s father, Hiram Brown, moved to Erie in 1851 and built a luxury hotel downtown at the current site of the Richford Arms on State Street.



*Hiram Brown's downtown hotel*

Sarah Hearn and her husband, John, eventually became Erie elite, making most of their fortune in railroading. They lived in a grand home on Erie’s West Sixth Street mansion row. It was their son, Hudson, who built the church in memory of his mother.

Sadly, Sarah Hearn, like so many of Erie’s center city, neighborhood churches, has fallen upon hard times. It was abandoned as an active Presbyterian Church and is currently listed as a “blighted property.” Sarah Hearn Church is not alone. Rather, it is a victim of a national trend. Gallup reports that regular church attendance has slipped from approximately 70% during the late 1990s to 47% last year. Exacerbating that steady macro-decline is the fact that a disproportionate number of those who regularly attend are going to mega-churches on the outskirts of cities, near thruway exits. Small neighborhood churches are closing at an alarming rate, regardless of denomination.



*Sarah Hearn Presbyterian Church at West Ninth and Cascade streets*

---

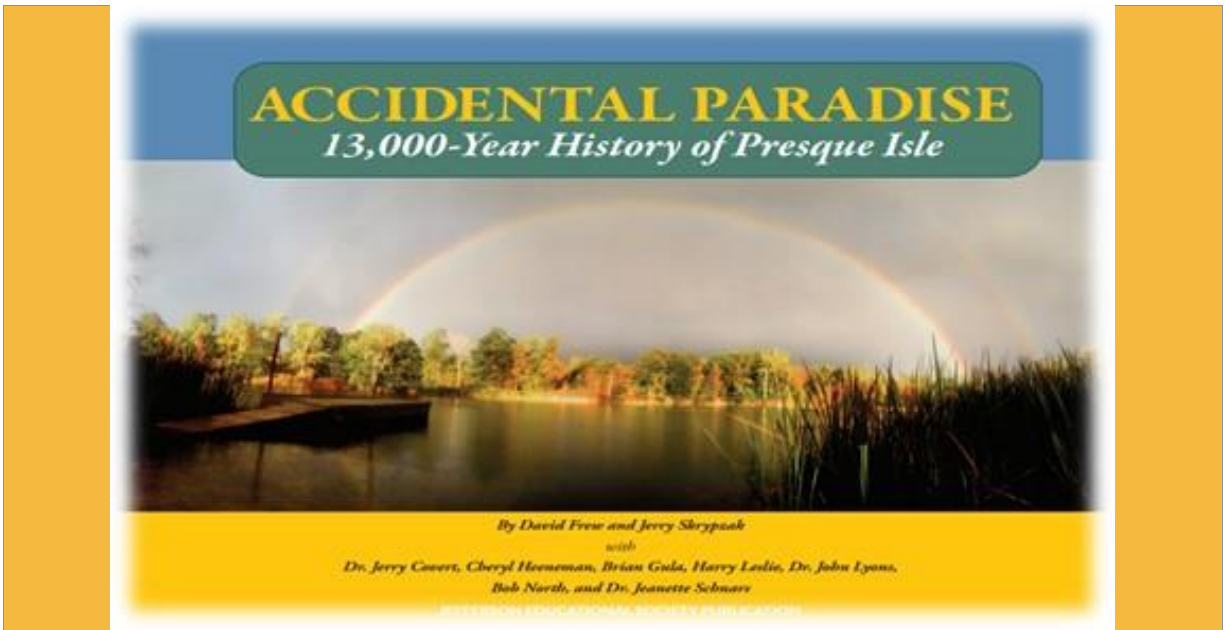
[Subscribe to JES Publications  
Mailing List!](#)

[Support JES | Donate](#)

---

***Accidental Paradise Available at TREC!***

***Accidental Paradise***  
*by Dr. David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak*



The beautiful book on Presque Isle published by authors David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak – **“Accidental Paradise: 13,000-Year History of Presque Isle”** – is on sale at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center’s gift shop and through a special website, [AccidentalParadise.com](http://AccidentalParadise.com).

The book, priced at **\$35 plus tax and shipping**, can be ordered now through the website sponsored by the TREC Foundation, [AccidentalParadise.com](http://AccidentalParadise.com).

Presque Isle Gallery and Gifts on the main floor of TREC, located at **301 Peninsula Drive, Suite #2, Erie, PA 16505** will also handle sales **daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

For more information, send an email to [aperino@TREC.org](mailto:aperino@TREC.org).

To watch "Accidental Paradise: Stories Behind The Stories" click [here](#).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Historian and author David Frew, Ph.D., is a Scholar-in-Residence at the JES. An emeritus professor at Gannon University, he held a variety of administrative positions during a 33-year career. He is also emeritus director of the Erie County Historical Society/Hagen History Center and is president of his own management consulting business. Frew has written or co-written 35 books and more than 100 articles, cases, and papers.*



## In Case You Missed It

[Jefferson Report | Transatlantic Idea-Sharing Can Lead to Just Economic Future](#) written by JES Vice President **Ben Speggen**

[The Wider World | Sub-Saharan Africa: Defining the Sahel and its Importance](#) written by President of DC Analytics **Diane Chido**

[Truth in Love | Generation Z and Their Attitudes Toward Death](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. Parris J. Baker** and **Dr. Phelecia Udoko**

[Probing Education | Cheyney University of Pennsylvania: the Oldest Black College in America](#) written by Director of the Brock Institute for Mega Issues Education **Rev. Charles Brock**

[Be Well | Cottage Cheese: The Comeback Kid](#) written by health and wellness expert **Debbie DeAngelo**

[Book Notes #150 | 'Chatting' with ChatGPT4](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. Andrew Roth**

[Building a Shipwreck Exhibit: Author Spotted Leaving a Seedy Motel by 'Most of My Friends'](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. David Frew**

Jefferson Educational Society | [jeserie.org](http://jeserie.org)

