Guyasuta: Warrior, Estate, and Home to Boy Scouts

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For nearly a century, Camp Guyasuta has been "an ideal place for Boy Scouts to live out their Handbook, to dream and be inspired and become good Americans." Situated on roughly 130 acres in a deep valley between Aspinwall and Sharpsburg, Guyasuta is the primary camp for the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) in the newly formed Laurel Highlands Council. But before Guyasuta was established in 1918, the land was home to multiple generations of a prominent Pittsburgh family. It also served as the burial ground for a famous Native American. It has hosted lively parties, protected wildlife as a sanctuary, and was the center of a contentious battle between the mighty Pennsylvania Railroad and a "silver-haired old woman."

The land's history can be traced back several hundred years to when Western Pennsylvania was home to the Iroquois, also known as the Indian Tribes of the Six Nations. Through friendly purchases and treaties, the William Penn family and its descendants acquired the land now known as Pennsylvania and eventually vested it to the Commonwealth in 1779. The legislature passed an Act in 1783 that divided the land into Depreciation and Donation lands. The Depreciation Lands were "set aside for the redemption of certificates of depreciation given to the officers and soldiers of the Pennsylvania Line [Revolutionary War] in lieu of money payments." Located in James Cunningham's district of Depreciation Lands, Tract 10 on the Allegheny River comprised 235 acres on the north side of the Allegheny River; it was named "Great Meadows" by its U.S. surveyors. In anticipation of Pittsburgh's growth, James O'Hara⁵ purchased this tract at a sheriff's sale for 23 pounds in 1794.

As a government agent, O'Hara traded with the Native Americans at Fort Pitt, and later served as a captain in the Revolutionary Army (3rd Virginia Regiment). After the war, O'Hara prospered as a trader, glass-maker, shipbuilder, brewer, banker, and iron manufacturer, becoming known as "Pittsburgh's first captain of industry." After

acquiring "Great Meadows," he renamed the property "Guyasuta" in honor of the famous chief of the Seneca tribe of the Six Nations, and invited him to live on the property.

Chief Guyasuta figured prominently in Western Pennsylvania's early history. He had been George Washington's guide during the young British lieutenant's first foray into this territory in 1753. During the ensuing French and Indian War, Guyasuta allied himself and the Six Nations to both the French and English. However, the English victors did not keep their word to the Indian tribes about stopping further settlement in the Ohio Valley, which led to Guyasuta's participation in Chief Pontiac's effort in 1763 to drive out English settlers from the newly won lands. When it was clear the English were not departing, Guyasuta befriended the English and helped negotiate an end to hostilities with Colonel Henry Bouquet. After the war between Britain and the American colonists, Guyasuta promoted friendly relations with the new U.S. government; one writer noted, "He was frequently at or in the neighborhood of Fort Pitt, and had unbounded influence with his people, an influence he generally exerted for good and in the interest of the colonies." Guyasuta spent his remaining years making peace treaties with the Americans.

When the Indian chief died around 1800, reportedly he was buried on the O'Hara property. According to one reference, "On the meadow near the mouth of Guyasuta Run the lodge of the famous Indian chief of that name is said to have been located; and his grave beneath two ancient trees a few rods east of the Darlington mansion-house was a well-known landmark for more than a century."

James O'Hara and his wife, Mary Carson, had six children. When James died in 1819 at his home on the banks of the Monongahela, 11 son Richard inherited Guyasuta, though there were no extant buildings on the estate other than a hunting lodge. 12 Presumably, Richard built a house on the property shortly thereafter since his daughter, Mary Carson O'Hara, stated she was born at Guyasuta in 1824. 13 Mary, who inherited the property upon her father's death in 1840, was a highly educated woman, well-read not only in English, but Italian, German, French, and Spanish. In 1845 she married 30-year-old William Darlington, an attorney by vocation but a historian by avocation. William

tore down the house and constructed a new home, writing in his diary "new house occupied" on June 1, 1846. ¹⁴ This home, "a commodious, rambling two-story brick structure ... painted a dark yellow," ¹⁵ was where the newlyweds settled and raised their three children: O'Hara, Mary, and Edith Darlington. They referred to both the estate and house as Guyasuta.

By this time, the Pennsylvania Railroad had laid tracks across the portion of the property adjacent to the Allegheny River, just north of the home. The Italianate-style home enjoyed a stately view of the water, and guests traveling from the railroad's Guyasuta Station were shaded by dozens of oak trees bordering the driveway. One frequent visitor to the house remarked:

The grounds surrounding the house were beautiful. All the land to the right as one entered the estate had been left in its natural beauty. Of course the underbrush had been cleared away and there were footpaths for those who loved to walk among the fine old trees and search for wild flowers, early buds, or fern, and other beauties of nature so luxuriant. At quite a distance from the house one came upon a resthouse, where the view overlooking the river was inviting and pleasant. The broad benches inside the lattice framed retreat were welcome after a tramp through the grounds. One eagerly sought an opportunity to rest and talk with companions or to daydream in solitude there. ¹⁶

As evidenced by their extensive collection of books, manuscripts, and maps related to Western Pennsylvania's colonial and revolutionary history, the Darlingtons had a love of history and preservation and passed that passion on to their children. Mary was an influential member of the Pittsburgh chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) of Allegheny County. Her sister, Edith, served as president of DAR and fought to preserve the Fort Pitt Block House from destruction by the Pennsylvania Railroad, foreshadowing events to come that would affect her family personally. When William died in September 1889, his obituary said he was "worth about \$2,000,000, and occupied a homestead built after the style of a baronial castle of a hundred years ago." 17

Although another 14 years would pass uneventfully, the year 1903 marked the beginning of a long and protracted battle between the Darlingtons and the Pennsylvania Railroad. A *Pittsburgh Press* article dated February 23, 1903, describes the railroad company's desire to purchase a few acres of the property along the water as part of a larger plan to build an extensive railroad yard between Sharpsburg and Aspinwall. As a way of preparing "vast improvements" on its West Penn division, the company wanted to handle bigger freight transportation along a new route that did not follow the old canal path along the base of the hills. Rather, a straighter, elevated track would serve as the primary means of travel along the Allegheny River's north banks.

The Pennsylvania Railroad slowly acquired two miles of riverfront property through "options," meaning it gained control of the property for the time being. However, the only land not secured was the Darlington property, which consisted of about eight acres on both sides of the old railroad line; the proposed track line ran directly through the house." As the *Press* wrote, on the river side sat the "old Darlington homestead ... on this account the owners have refused to sell." Not to be deterred, the railroad prepared to enter into condemnation proceedings in the Allegheny County courts.

The railroad filed its proceedings in the summer of 1905, but by 1906, Mary Darlington (the mother, aged 82) still had not budged. *The Pittsburg Leader* reported, "Mrs. Darlington realizes that to leave Guyasuta would be almost a mortal wound to her for she has its memories so closely allied with and entwined about her life that it would be like withdrawing the support of the mighty oak from the weak and clinging vine." On September 24, *The Pittsburgh Press* reported that she had retained attorney Samuel Ammon, her son-in-law, to represent the family's interest in opposing further railroad improvements. The reason was that the railroad now wanted to eradicate Six Mile Island, which sat directly south of Guyasuta in the Allegheny River but was believed to be part of the Darlington estate.

By December, the paper indicated that a decision from retiring Attorney General Hampton Carson was expected any day on the railroad's right to take the property under eminent domain.²⁰ The paper described the property as being a "magnificent domain of several hundred acres, and has a mansion house, built just previous to the opening of the Civil War."²¹

Apparently the railroad offered Mrs. Darlington a substantial sum of money, but she still refused "being so attached to the old place" that she fought the company "with every resource at her command." She in fact countersued by filing a bill of restraint "on the ground that the granting of the company's wishes would be an infraction of her riparian rights" (a person who owns land on the bank of a natural watercourse or body of water). Pitting this "silvered-hair old woman" against the mighty Pennsylvania Railroad inevitably drew the interest of Pittsburgh society, who eagerly watched the contest. To many, Mrs. Darlington was a heroine; indeed, she never capitulated to the railroad, living out her life at Guyasuta until her death there on June 18, 1915.

The land had been in Mary's family since her grandfather had acquired it in 1794. Now the property passed to her three surviving children, although her son would only live another year before he died at Guyasuta. The daughters, Mary and Edith, remained at Guyasuta and continued to rebuff offers from the railroad for several more years.

During this time, the Boy Scouts made their first appearance at Guyasuta, though it's not known how the Scouts and the Darlington family were introduced or how the Scouts came to camp on the property. The first record is a news story in spring 1918: *The Pittsburgh Press* indicated that the hard winter had prevented the Scouts from camping outside, but "tonight 50 will do it at 'Guyasuta creek' on the Darlington estate." The April 20 issue says that "Burdick tents have been secured for the occasion and each man will be required to cook his supper." The Boy Scouts were "under the charge of 'Grizzly' Smith who will tell the story of Chief Guyasuta and the land upon which they camped."

The Scouting organization was founded in the United States only a few years earlier, in 1910. As the movement spread west, each newly formed Boy Scout region was administrated separately. In fact, the area between Millvale and East Deer Township was

first known as the Guyasuta Council. When it merged into the larger Allegheny Council in 1914, the area retained the name Guyasuta District, becoming one of many other districts comprising the Council. Through some unknown circumstances, Mary and Edith welcomed this new boys' organization to camp on their property.

Perhaps their invitation to the Boy Scouts was in part done on purpose as they continued to fight the Pennsylvania Railroad to retain the property. Or perhaps their brother, O'Hara, had earlier made connections to the Boy Scouts; he had a love of the outdoors and natural history as exhibited in the books he collected for his library. These are only conjectures since the historical record is unfortunately silent.

By 1918, a world war had been raging for several years, and the federal government required innumerable resources to offer resistance to the growing German empire. The Darlingtons had successfully fought the Pennsylvania Railroad for 15 years, but were no match against the U.S. government, which took over the railroads during the Great War. In June 1918, the two daughters "reluctantly surrendered" 27 acres for the government to build a new railroad line through their property. While the court decided the property value for appropriate compensation, Mary and Edith were forced to vacate it within 30 days. Guyasuta was then torn down, its library and furnishings bequeathed to the University of Pittsburgh. ²⁶

Miss Mary Darlington told the *Leader*, "We have lived here all our lives because this has been our home and now it is to be taken away from us under the guise of Federal power but we shall submit because we will not fight Uncle Sam. We fought the railroad for 15 years and we whipped them. But war has changed the situation. The necessities of war are greater than the necessities of one's particular home and so we surrender."²⁷

Mary moved in with her sister Edith and husband in their house in the East End. But Mary was not the only one to leave the estate. Supposedly Chief Guyasuta's body was exhumed and his bones donated to the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. ²⁸ He was eventually reburied at Custaloga Town Scout Reservation near French Creek

Township, Pa., although other sources dispute whether he had ever been buried at Guyasuta at all.²⁹ Despite the emotional toil, pain, and frustration this series of events must have caused, the sisters were compensated. *The Gazette Times* reported on May 14, 1919, that because the Darlington heirs and railroad company could not agree upon the land value, the Allegheny County board of viewers would assess the damages. The sum granted was \$495,427.³⁰ They obviously sympathized with the daughters having given them "one of the largest awards ever."³¹

When Mary vacated Guyasuta in June 1918, it is clear that the relationship with the Boy Scouts was special. Apparently, she had "long cherished the idea of making this property over to the Boy Scouts organization of Allegheny County." John H. Nicholson, a member of the BSA Council Executive Board, and Erasmus Wilson, president of the Boy Scouts of Allegheny County (also a distinguished writer of the daily column "Quiet Observations" in the *Gazette Times*), were instrumental in laying the groundwork for securing the property. A meeting held at the Allegheny County Council headquarters in 1922 was devoted to the discussion of developing Guyasuta into a Boy Scout campground. The June 3 section of "The Trail of the Boy Scouts" in *The Pittsburgh Press* reported on the meeting led by C.L. Pierce, Jr., council president, regarding how to "carry out the plans of Miss Mary O'Hara Darlington, who gave use of this pretty forest reserve to the Boy Scouts of the entire county. Plans for the development of the reserve were discussed. It is intended to fit the big grounds for every use the Scouts may make of it under their rules, for swimming, tracking, camping, signaling, bird and tree study, outdoor games and others."

The use of this land in such a capacity by such a new organization must have meant a great deal to Mary Darlington, by now sole possessor of the estate. When she died in 1925, she bequeathed part of her estate to the University of Pittsburgh to support the Darlington Memorial Library to preserve the family's historical treasures. She also left what had become known as the "Guyasuta Reservation" to the Boy Scouts. Her will reads in part:

This tract of land to be owned by the Boy Scouts as they have been using it for several years. The official name to be, "The Darlington Bird Sanctuary, Guyasuta Reservation." to be under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Forestry Department, to preserve wild flowers and other plants and trees as well as birds and small animals.³⁵

An October 1927 article in *The Pittsburgh Press* confirmed this gift, and added that "the Squaw Run property was left to the Boy Scouts for a bird sanctuary."³⁶

The Boy Scouts were camping at Guyasuta almost a decade before the property became officially theirs in 1925. It was just a valley mostly untouched by any noticeable human improvements, but the men (many former Scouts) returning from World War I were eager to expend their energy on volunteering to build Guyasuta for the next generation. About the only installations that existed at the camp in 1918 were a dirt road, a crude footbridge, and a lean-to. Within a decade, that was no longer the case. In 1927, Scouts, adult leaders, and outside volunteers finished constructing the property's first permanent structure, the appropriately named Darlington Lodge, made from donated telephone poles. The lodge was the general meeting place for all activities and the center of Scouting affairs on the grounds. A dormitory annex that slept 40 Scouts was soon added. Sadly, Darlington Lodge burned to the ground in the early 1940s and was never replaced.

Due to its ease of accessibility, Guyasuta Reservation was becoming home to more and more Scouting activity because it could be reached on foot from many Pittsburgh neighborhoods, was easily accessed by regular bus service, and was a short drive from any part of Allegheny County. As year-round weekend camping became a priority, Scouts constructed "frame clapboard cabins with bunks and pot-bellied stoves or fireplaces" to accommodate troops who had little to no equipment for camping outside. ³⁷At first their shelters bore such nondescriptive names as Brown cabin and Green, but this soon gave way to naming the cabins after Indian tribes. As the winter of

1928 approached, the Boy Scouts were looking forward to their first winter camp of the year at Guyasuta as *The Pittsburgh Press* reported December 28:

A score of boys from Allegheny County Council West, brimming over with enthusiasm, praying for snow and frozen water pail and the long white winter trail, assembled in the Scout bunk house.... And so the names of the intrepid youths of the district go down as pioneers, as boys to whom the hardships are only hazards in a fine game and whose life is exciting in the measure that it is difficult. So the flag flies high over the crude camp buildings and the brown of Scout uniforms dot the hillsides near Aspinwall.³⁸

Although it is unknown how many "intrepid youths" participated in this winter camp, by this time the Allegheny Council had grown to more than 4,700 Scouts comprising 194 troops.

When the post-war government emphasized a tree-planting campaign, the Boy Scouts rose to the occasion. According to an article in *The Pittsburgh Press* in 1929, the Scouts had greatly improved "Guyasuta Reservation," including clearing underbrush and dead wood to prepare for planting trees on a large scale.³⁹ Ten years earlier, the Scouts had planted pines and hemlocks provided by the State Department of Forestry for winter shelter for the birds, and cherry and mulberry trees, provided by Scout officials, "the fruit to be divided between birds and boys." ⁴⁰ The black walnuts and conifers seen today in the lower valley sprang from those plantings nearly 100 years ago.

The 1930s witnessed a building boom at Camp Guyasuta, as the property became known by 1931. The Calvary Episcopal Church constructed a second log cabin to complement Darlington Lodge; this effectively doubled the number of Scouts who could spend the weekend. Other shelters and semi-permanent buildings arose throughout the woods, including several service buildings and the Trading Post, plus others built by the Rotarians and Kiwanians. During the summer of 1933, *The Pittsburgh Press* reported that "867 boys were recorded at Guyasuta with 52 troops being represented." By the end of

the 1930s, the camp consisted of 14 cabins that could sleep 200 Scouts, with names such as Grimm Glass, Sherwood Manor, Green Lantern, Hiawatha, and Eagle's Mere. Meanwhile, the Scouts had been busy clearing paths to create at least three designated hiking trails throughout the property as well as trailside shelters, outposts, rustic footbridges, and trail signs. Adirondack shelters and tent sites were dotted throughout the camp by the early 1940s.

Camp Guyasuta's 25th anniversary came and went fairly unnoticed in 1943 as the country was in the midst of World War II. During the war years, Camp Guyasuta served as a National Defense training ground and offered civil defense courses. Construction and other improvements resumed in the post-war years when a pool was added. Likewise a firearms range introduced the boys to skeet and rifle practice; it was not uncommon for the boys to receive lessons from local police officers. By the 1950s, the camp's growth had led to a need for a full-time ranger to live on the property year round; a home was built for this purpose in 1960. Reluctantly, but through necessity, the Boy Scouts gave up roughly 20 acres of the property's southernmost portion to make way for Route 28 construction in the 1960s.

By this time Camp Guyasuta had evolved into a top-notch, short-term camp and training center, had outlived six other Council-operated camps, and was becoming "not only a Scoutland but sort of a showcase of Scouting activities and objectives." Much of Camp Guyasuta's growth was due in large part to support from the public and local charities. In return, the newly organized Friends of Scouting association routinely invited members of local communities to visit Camp Guyasuta and see firsthand how their resources were being spent. Nearby residents were encouraged to walk the grounds, picnic, and enjoy this pocket of untouched wilderness amidst rapidly industrialized Pittsburgh. Through the institution of American Heritage Campfires, the public was invited to spend summer Friday evenings at Camp Guyasuta's newly constructed amphitheatre enjoying lively American history presentations. Local personalities such as Jack Bogut and Bill Burns entertained audiences.

As the 1970s came to an end, the camp's infrastructure had markedly improved and the building campaign drew to a close. Camp Guyasuta became the "workshop" for building the infrastructure for Heritage Reservation, a new Boy Scout campground situated on 2,000 acres in Fayette County. Opened in 1980, Heritage offered a camping experience on a scale not imagined nor anticipated by earlier generations of Scouts. But it was the Scouts at Guyasuta who prepped and constructed the majority of items needed at Heritage, such as tent platforms, program boxes, stoves, carts, and sundry items.

Although the Rotary Lodge was added in 1990, more than two decades passed at Camp Guyasuta without significant improvement, yet the camp remained the primary short-term camp for the newly formed Greater Pittsburgh Council. By 1999, more than 3,000 Scouts had spent a portion of their summer there. Meanwhile, the camp was showing its age. Through a personal donation from Gerry and Audrey McGinnis, the McGinnis Education Center, a "green" facility, was constructed in 2005. This multipurpose center greets all Scouts and visitors entering Camp Guyasuta. In addition to sleeping 120 Scouts, the center boasts a large kitchen facility, meeting rooms, and administrative offices. The gift also enabled the Boy Scouts to build a high ropes course on the property as well as improve the Guyasuta Creek trail to accommodate persons with disabilities to hike to the nearby waterfalls.

The adjacent communities of Sharpsburg, Aspinwall, and Fox Chapel have welcomed these improvements and have contributed to Camp Guyasuta's success by donating equipment, improving traffic flow, and creating signage, among other things. Each year more than 20,000 boys and girls, Scouts and non-Scouts alike, from southwestern Pennsylvania visit Camp Guyasuta as part of a summer camp experience, day camp, class, or recreational activity. For instance, students from Taylor Allderdice High School have participated in the high ropes course as part of their freshmen orientation week to learn conflict resolution, problem solving, and team building. According to Camp Ranger Mike Daniher, "the opportunity for these kids to be in a wilderness setting and learn how to work with each other to solve problems really impacts them in a positive way when they go back to the classroom." Companies and

non-profits utilize the McGinnis Center for day-long retreats and other meetings. And perhaps most importantly, Camp Guyasuta is open to the public for anyone to swim, hike, and enjoy the wildlife.

Whether the property has been called Great Meadows, Guyasuta Run, Darlington Run, Squaw Run, Guyasuta Reservation, The Darlington Bird Sanctuary, or just plain Guyasuta, its importance was perfectly summarized by Edmund Arthur back in 1926: "It seems entirely consistent that a property that has been almost from Revolutionary days in the ownership of one of the oldest and most prominent families in this vicinity, should now be dedicated to so worthy a public use as that provided by the will of Miss Darlington." The Darlington family would be pleased to know how their land has benefitted the lives of countless boys and girls in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Visit the Camp Guyasuta website for more information about the camp.

Ed Galloway is head of the Archives Service Center at the University of Pittsburgh, where he manages the processing, preservation, and servicing of archival collections. He also coordinates digitization activities of primary research material for the University Library System, including the material found in the <u>Darlington Digital Library</u> and <u>Historic Pittsburgh</u>. His son is a member of BSA Troop 90 in Forest Hills.

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² The Pittsburgh Press, December 30, 1906. Accessed online November 17, 2011.

³ Fishman. Joel. "Historical Sketch to Land Titles in Western Pennsylvania," August 2002. Accessed <u>online</u> November 17, 2011.

⁴ Warrantee atlas of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, 1914, Plate no. 44. The atlas, which indicates the original land grant settlers of present-day Allegheny County, shows that the property was comprised of 229 acres and was first conveyed to Edward Bartholomew and surveyed in July 1785 by Francis Johnston. Accessed online November 17, 2011.

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- ¹² Chalfant, Ella. *A goodly heritage: earliest wills on an American Frontier* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1955), p. 200 indicates his will mentions no significant structures at Guyasuta. Accessed online November 17, 2011.
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- ¹⁹ The Pittsburg Leader, August 27, 1905.
- ²⁰ The Pittsburgh Press, December 30, 1906, Accessed online November 17, 2011.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ The Pittsburgh Press, April 20, 1918. Accessed online November 17, 2011.
- ²⁵ The Pittsburgh Press, June 30, 1918. Accessed online November 17, 2011.
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³² Arthur, 24.

³³ Mauro, page unknown.

³⁴ The Pittsburgh Press, June 3, 1922. Accessed online November 17, 2011.

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³⁶ The Pittsburgh Press, October 25, 1927. Accessed online November 17, 2011.

³⁷ Mauro.

³⁸ The Pittsburgh Press, December 28, 1928. Accessed online November 17, 2011.

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⁴¹ The Pittsburgh Press, September 3, 1933.

⁴² Mauro.

⁴³ Arthur, 24.