

It's Raining 'Cat's Meows' In Meyersdale

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MEYERSDALE (Somerset Co.) — It's raining mostly cats in the southern Somerset County town of Meyersdale.

Lately, in this historic railroading and farming town, there has been an upsurge of fundraisers going on with Cat's Meow wooden shelf sitters.

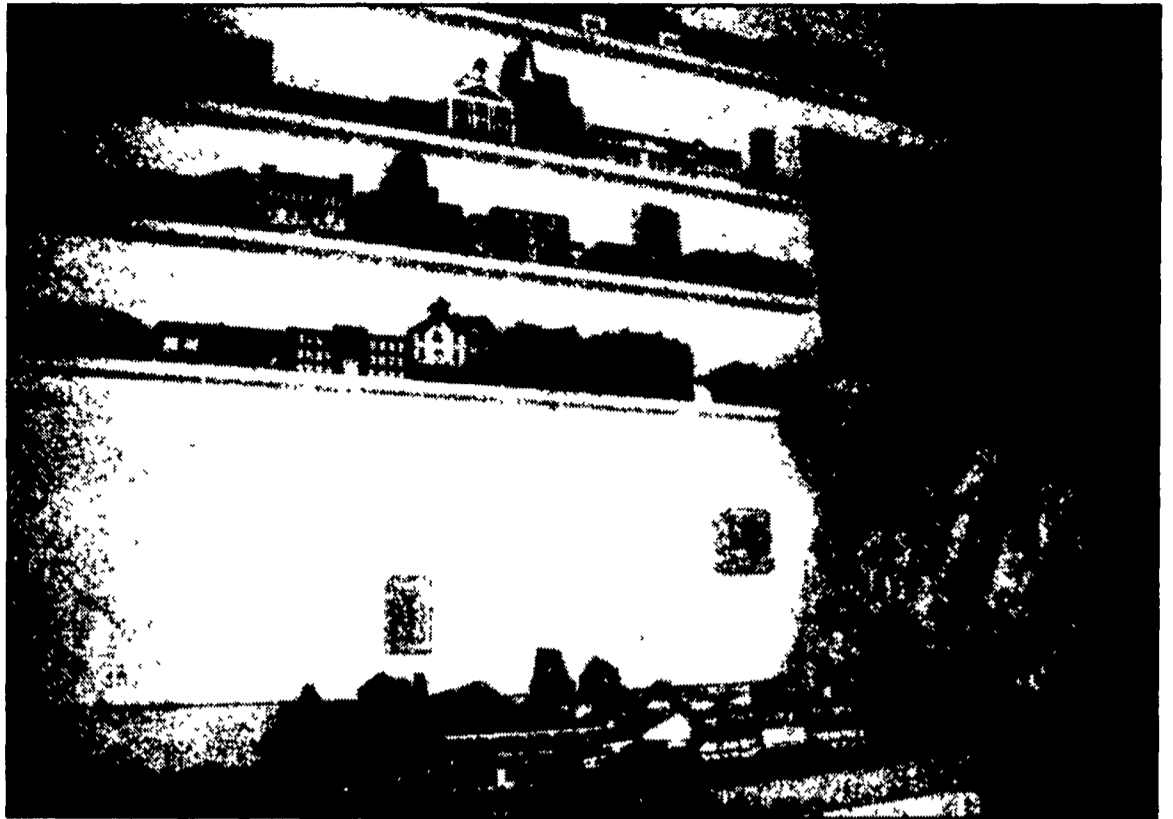
"I jokingly say that there are probably more Cat's Meow cats in Meyersdale than there are actual cats," said Don Walukas, a member of Meyersdale Borough Council and Meyersdale Area Historical Society.

Walukas' wife Barbara is a board member of the Historical Society and she believes that the Cat's Meow fundraisers have helped those with an interest in history and those with an interest in collecting to better appreciate the historic value of the town, while at the same time raise much needed funds for nonprofits.

"This is a very special little town," said Mrs. Walukas, who is a native of Meyersdale but lived in the Midwest and the South before retirement. "Some people

used to collect the old postcards of the 1920s and 1930s, which give us a glimpse into what different areas looked like back then. I think the Cat's Meows will be something someone picks up 100 years from now and will be able to see into the past because buildings may not always be there."

The initial project took off a little more than a year ago when members of the Meyersdale Area Historical Society decided to remake the historic Western Maryland Train Station in Meyersdale into a Cat's Meow shelf sitter. The train station, built in 1912 and closed in the early 1970s, sat in disrepair for several years until the society recently refurbished it and opened it as their headquarters a few years ago. The station sits along the Allegheny Highlands Biking Trail, which is currently being completed for hiking and biking throughout Somerset County to the Maryland line, and will connect into the Western Maryland system of rail paths from Pittsburgh to Washington D.C.



Nancy Hornig of Meyersdale began collecting Cat's Meow shelf sitters about 10 years ago. She never imagined her simple hobby would become a big fund-raising project for the nonprofits of Meyersdale.

"The society ordered an initial batch of 90 stations and then had to reorder four more batches of 60 in order to satisfy the demand," said Nancy Hornig of Meyersdale, who had been instru-

mental in starting the project. After that, the society ordered some of the Salisbury Viaduct, which also sits on the former Western Maryland railroad and has been completely restored as part of the biking path.

Hornig began collecting Cat's Meow shelf sitters about 10 years ago after picking some up at her and her husband Herb's favorite vacation spots of Rehoboth Beach. Now, she has collected more than 130 pieces, including some from eastern Pennsylvania, New England, and the Midwest. Her collection is displayed on shelves in her home near the town of Meyersdale. Her friends sometimes visit to talk and admire her collection.

"They are quite a conversation piece," she laughs. "I have a friend who has been here many times, and she stills just sits and looks at them. What I like is that they (Cat's Meows) are a lasting memory of where I have been and they don't take a lot of care."

Hornig never imagined that her simple collections would turn into a town project but a few years ago, she presented the idea to the historical society board because she believed it would be a great fundraiser.

Since that time, many of the churches in and around Meyersdale, including Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church, Meyersdale United Methodist Church, Meyersdale Church of the Brethren and Meyersdale Lutheran Church, have all sold the collectibles as fund-raisers.

In addition, the Somerset Trust Company and Citizen's

National Banks have sold their replicas of their sites. Somerset Trust has donated the money to the Meyersdale Renaissance Inc. for a main street manager program and Citizen's has donated the money back to the historical society.

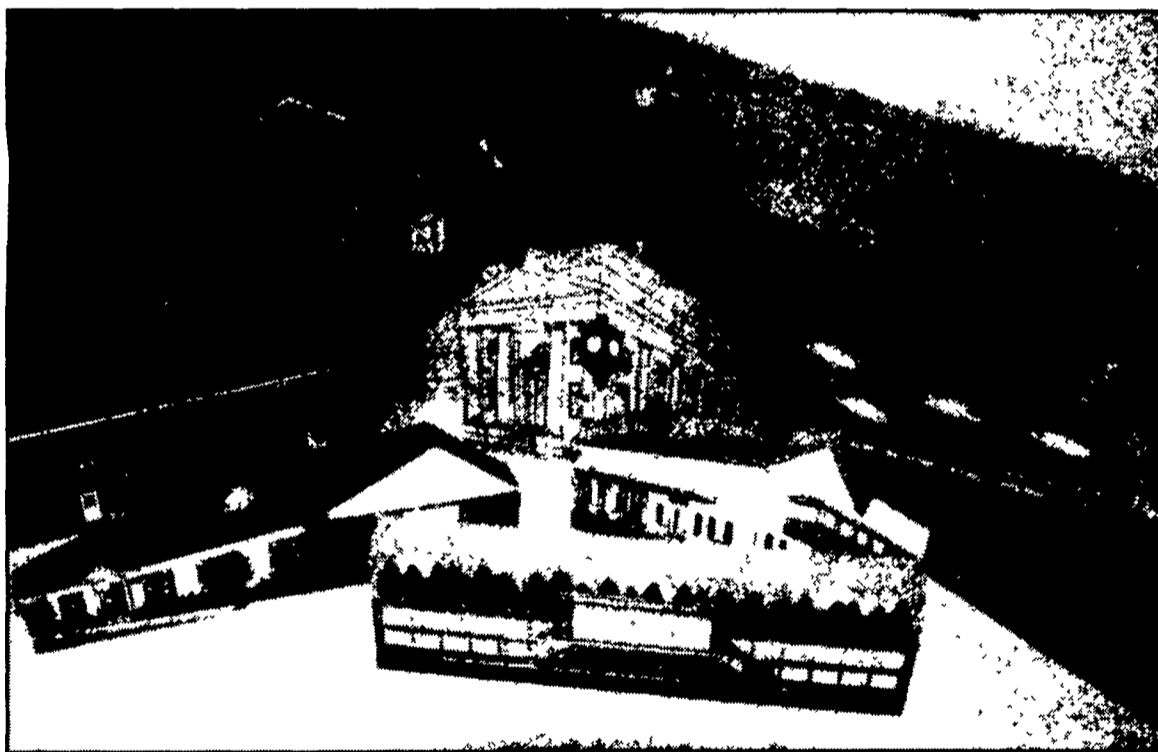
Also, the Meyersdale Volunteer Fire Department, the Meyersdale Borough, the Meyersdale Library and the Meyersdale Hospital have each sold the Cat's Meows as fund-raisers for their organizations. Meyersdale Chamber of Commerce did one of the World War I Doughboy Monument in the center of Meyersdale. And, the borough also did one of the Paul Fuller Playground.

The latest one done is of Maple Manor, the oldest structure in Meyersdale and the focal point of the Pennsylvania Maple Festival. The Maple Festival committee held the fundraiser.

Now, the youth group at the Meyersdale Church of the Brethren is taking orders for the Wilmoth Mansion, a stoic structure built in Meyersdale in the mining heyday but has since been torn down.

Collectibles have also been done of the windmills in Garrett and the historic gristmill outside of Meyersdale.

"The possibilities are endless," said Hornig. "There are sites in Salisbury that have been destroyed by the tornadoes a few years ago that may be a new venture. The Cat's Meows are inexpensive and they never wear out. They are a great collectible for anyone and they are a great fund-raiser for any nonprofit."



When the entire little Cat's Meow wooden collectibles are placed together, the town of Meyersdale looks like a little Dickens' village.



The Western Maryland Train Station, built in 1912 for the Western Maryland Railroad and closed in the 1970s when that line was completely abandoned, serves as the headquarters of the Meyersdale Area Historical Society, the group that refurbished it in recent years. The society started out doing a fund-raiser by making a Cat's Meow replica of the property and the idea has since caught on.

