

## The Asa Sheetz Collection

An article in the Shenandoah Herald April 27, 1928 tells us about a local amateur taxidermist, Asa Sheetz, and his mounted wildlife specimen collection which became very well known in the region. Here's the story:

“Mr. Noah R. Sheetz left Woodstock Wednesday for Charlestown WV where he will exhibit the splendid display of mounted wild animals collected during almost a lifetime of study by his father, the late Asa A. Sheetz, who was a great student of nature and with rare skill succeeded in capturing and mounting in life-like posture various animals, birds and reptiles of Virginia and parts of WV. After the death of his father Mr. Sheetz purchased the specially made auto truck (and with) the specimens.... expects to spend the summer displaying this interesting and educational collection of wildlife in various sections of VA and PA and possibly further north. Beside the specimens of wildlife there will be on display also two life-like dogs, a pointer and a German police dog and a two-headed calf. Mr. Sheetz is accompanied by his brother Mr. Harry Sheetz.”

Historian John Wayland, in his book, *A History of Shenandoah County, VA*, writes about Asa Sheetz, declaring that the collection is the best in the state and quoting from Mr. Sheetz as to how it came about. Mr. Sheetz was quoted as saying that “in 1921 while hunting in Bath County, I was successful in bagging a very fine deer... This head was mounted by myself, the first piece of taxidermy work I ever finished. After mounting the deer head, of which I was rather proud, I placed it in the Corner Drugstore window. Pretty soon someone wanted to know whether I could mount a pet cat that had just died. This I did. Next I mounted an opossum, placed it in a window.... Then I wanted more, and gradually, mounted a specimen as I could secure one... in 1922, being then superintendent of our local fair grounds at Woodstock, in order to add a little variety to the exhibits, I placed my small collection in a four-foot square case which I built in the exhibition hall for this purpose... Interest spread to the managers of other fairs, whose representatives offered to compensate me for showing the collection at their fairs as an educational exhibit... Our collection has grown to its present proportions gradually and now includes practically all of Virginia's wild fur and game animals and upland game birds, from quail to wild turkey. Of animals, we have them from little red squirrels to bears; fur bearers, from civet cat to otter; hawks and owls, of the latter, we have six different species. This business has grown far beyond our fondest hopes and is still growing by leaps and bounds. My son and myself are busy all of the time, and work piling up. But as nature is our life study, we love the work, which we find intensely interesting. Our present collection includes about 80 specimens – animals, birds, fishes, snakes, etc. and is valued at several thousand dollars, though not for sale.”

Mr. Sheetz's grandson, Jack Sheetz, reports that the last remaining piece of the collection that he knows of was the two-headed calf, displayed for many years at Endless Caverns. Mr. Sheetz's son, Jake Sheetz, who was a well-known furniture maker, also learned the skill of taxidermy. A specimen mounted by him, a loon, is on display at the Woodstock Museum.

This moment from the past was presented by the Shenandoah County Historical Society.