

## Season's Greetings (well, it's after Christmas, but it's still a season, isn't it?) from Middle Kittanning Cottage.



Why the name? My house was the center one of three identical small houses built to house miners for a local coal mine here in Glouster, Ohio, a bit over a hundred years ago. The principal coal being mined was Middle Kittanning Coal (#6 coal). So I was able to make a bit of a pun out of it. At least this house will NEVER, ever, be flooded by high waters. It's on the foot of a hill, but still some forty feet in elevation above the flood level of Sunday Creek; some fifty feet above normal water level. I think I'm safe. Why is it named Sunday Creek? Because when the early exploring and mapping team came up the Hocking River (which was then the Hockhocking River), they came to the mouth of the creek on Sunday evening, and, I guess, were kind of tired of finding names for creeks by then. The next day, they crossed Sunday creek, and, the same

day, came right smack up to yet another creek. So that one is named – yeah, you could guess this – Monday Creek. They had already named, in the area of Athens, Federal Creek (because it had thirteen tributaries); Margaret Creek (after Margaret Snowden, the first woman settler in the Northwest Territories); Sugar Creek (after sugar maple trees). The largest tributary to Monday Creek, btw, was named Snow Fork, though I think sometime later. I speculate, but don't know, that it was named from aluminum ore in the creek, which turns it white (at least, that's so today at a couple of spots).

So, I've been kind of camping out in mostly one to three rooms of this house since I moved in. It was in a bad fire a bit over three years ago. I'm buying it on a land contract (= contract for deed), so I'm entirely responsible for it. Fortunately, it was still a sound shell, with a good-quality white metal roof. The price was \$10,000 with no down; I couldn't afford anything better. I'm slowly renovating it, but it's excruciatingly slow, largely for two reasons: lack of funds, and a bad back. But I'm getting there. By the time I have it paid off, it ought to be in reasonably good shape (about a decade from now, that is), by which time I'll either be retired or dead. The white metal roof, incidentally, does keep this house much cooler in the summer than it otherwise would be.

I am living on disability, a combination of heart, orthopedic, and other problems. It turns out that my excruciating back problem is actually a badly arthritic left sacro-iliac joint. It's a result of four decades of imbalance due to the knee problems. I've also been diagnosed with cardiomyopathy, with a reduced cardiac output (that's in addition to the pacemaker). I've been trying to get surgery scheduled on my foot for over a year, but it's been really, really difficult because of trying to line up surgical clearances. Okay. I'm ready. Ready for my new, cloned body!

In my work with the Athens Conservancy, we finally this year closed on 11 miles of former railroad grade, to be used as a rail-trail. It took hundreds of hours worth of work time, and the deed description alone was originally written at forty pages (normally, in most deeds, it is one paragraph); I managed to prune it down to, I think 21 pages. I am finally getting something of a reputation here for knowing my way around deeds. The foto is of an old stone culvert that the railroad grade passes over. We also finished acquiring a 13.5-acre nature preserve in The Plains, a community close to Athens, which will also provide right-of-way for a bikeway extension. Right now, I'm working on three more grants to expand land protection for the state park, and to further extend bikeway rights of way.



And I'm continuing my trail work. We will soon substantially complete a "new" one-mile trail, the Trace Trail, providing a shorter connection between Athens and the nearby state park, Strouds Run. This trail is based on the route of the original Marietta-Chillicothe stage road, the main highway through the area in the early 1800s, but

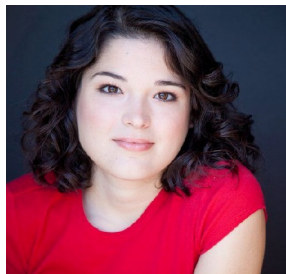
now largely a barely-discernible old road trace in the woods. We literally had to carve about ten feet of the trail into a sandstone outcropping at one point because of a 10-foot dropoff on the hillside.



Still writing the occasional science-fiction story, and they all still get rejected. I currently have a book proposal submitted for a Ferns of Ohio work. I have great hopes for that. I have again begun my cartoon strip, which is on Facebook: North of Here. Only three strips done so far, but more coming. I find I'm out of practice after several years hiatus, but I will re-learn fast. I submitted one book proposal for a book I'm writing, A Sustainable Society, and it was rejected, but there are still lots of places to try.

I'm researching a little-known group of plants, the spikemosses (that's one in the foto – the native one around these parts). These have long all been lumped in one genus, *Selaginella*, with over 600 species, even though divergence among the genetic lines began as long ago as three to four hundred million years. I'm working on re-organizing this into three families, with somewhere from 7 to 10 genera. There's a lot of resistance to splitting this up into more discrete groups, but I'm working on it. Or at it. Or around it. I'm considering trying to publish this in an eastern European botanical journal, because of the resistance in the botanical community to re-organizing this group.

Daughter Libby is going back to school, taking a course or two at a time, which is precisely what I wound up doing. Only thing is, she's doing it years earlier than I did. Her current major, I think, is computer engineering. Her fiancé, Peter, has an electrical engineering degree and works as a software engineer. They live in Lexington, Kentucky, which is Libby's chosen homeplace.



Daughter Rachel is in her senior year at Northern Illinois University, in the glacial till flatlands of northern Illinois; her major is theater, remember that? Anyway, she's hoping to hike a chunk of the Appalachian Trail this summer, possibly doing the state of Georgia. She was present at the school a couple of years ago when that lunatic murdered several people on campus, but was, fortunately, able to be locked away in a safe place. Perhaps the absolute flatness of the area contributed to his insanity.

Sister Thea and all her clan are still doing the Price stuff up in Washington State. Sister Karen and Larry are still in Tucson, Arizona, enjoying the warmth and sun – er, I think they got chilly toes for a night or two recently, but, hah, they should have it so good. Brother Charles right now is working on plans for A Machine in West Virginia right at the moment.

Anyway, have a great year! And do something great!

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