

## **More Franklin Park Stories**

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### **Blue Laws**

Driving through Amish country with its *No Sunday Sales* signs and closed shops is a reminder of how life used to be for all Pennsylvanians. In fact, Sunday hunting and automobile sales are still prohibited in our state. As recently as 1976, the Pennsylvania Superior Court confirmed that municipalities could prosecute stores for Sunday sales in a case involving McCandless, Ross, and O'Hara townships and two grocery chains, *A & P* and *Krogers*. Following the proceedings closely were the *Gimbels* and *Kaufmans* department stores, which wanted to open on Sundays for Christmas shopping.

The Sunday Blue Laws originated in 1794 New England and prohibited "worldly employment or business on the Lord's day, commonly called Sunday." Puritan influence spread throughout the nation as states adopted variations of the laws. One of the most widely adopted laws prohibited Sunday sales of alcohol.

As our society changed, laws changed until there was a crazy quilt of what could and could not be sold and which activities were and were not permitted on Sundays. Enforcement, however, was spotty at best.

While many of us now enjoy attending or participating in Sunday afternoon concerts and sporting events, these activities were once considered illegal. In April 1927, members of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra were arrested and fined for playing a Sunday concert at the Syria Mosque in Oakland where over three thousand concertgoers shared a defiant spirit. Complaints were filed and fines levied, but charges were eventually dismissed.

One reported reason the National Football League accepted thirty-two year old Art Rooney as the new owner of the Pittsburgh franchise was because of his political connections that would be helpful in overturning the prohibition against Sunday sporting events. At the time, football games were played on Wednesday nights at Oakland's Forbes Field.

Pressure to modify or repeal Blue Laws continued to grow and a bill that would allow each community to decide whether or not to permit Sunday sporting events was placed on the 1933 November ballot. A majority of Pittsburgh voters cast their ballots in favor of allowing Sunday sporting events and concerts, while in Franklin Township (Franklin Park Borough) the measure to allow Sunday games of baseball and football was defeated with 193 residents in favor and 216 against. Years later, township voters would also be asked to decide if the Sunday showing of films should be allowed at the local drive-in theater.

In time, society and laws changed to where stores are now open for Sunday sales, although with shortened hours, and sporting and cultural events have become staples of Sunday afternoon entertainment. Blue Laws prohibiting "worldly employment or business on the Lord's day" have become a footnote in history.