

Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

XLI, Number 3

November 2013

Wednesday, November 13, 2013

7:30 p.m., at the Old Sewickley Post Office

Incident at the Crossroads: Malmédy

A PowerPoint Presentation by George S. Gaadt

The Malmédy Massacre was the most infamous shooting of unarmed American prisoners of war during World War II. The story begins with a local soldier from Sewickley, T/5 Albert M. Valenzi, serving with "B" Battery, 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion, a battery made up primarily of men from Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland and West Virginia. This is a story of death, of luck and of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

On December 17, 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge, more than 80 U. S. soldiers were shot down after having surrendered to a Waffen-SS unit in the village of Baugnez, near the crossroads town of Malmédy, Belgium. Although more than 40 men survived to tell of the massacre, exactly what took place that day remains mired in controversy. Was it just a "battlefield incident," or was it a deliberate slaughter?

In this PowerPoint presentation, George S. Gaadt will vividly reconstruct the critical events leading up to the atrocity and will relate stories from the survivors of the tragic aftermath.

PLEASE NOTE: Some of the material presented may not be suitable for some individuals.

George Stephen Gaadt was born in Erie, PA, and educated at Columbus College of Art and Design in Columbus, OH. An artist and illustrator, he has lectured widely and is a former instructor at Carnegie Mellon University and Sweetwater Center for the Arts and has served on the Boards of Sewickley Valley Historical Society, Sweetwater Center for the Arts and the Daniel B. Matthews Historical Society.

His clients have included the National Football League, the Major League Baseball, Basketball and Football Halls of Fame and the Pittsburgh Steelers. Last May he donated "Morning Glory," his portrait of B. G. Shields, founder and former Executive Director of SVHS, to the Historical Society. He has received over 95 awards for his work and has exhibited both nationally and internationally.

In addition to his art work, Gaadt is also an amateur historian and collector of military memorabilia. Throughout his life, military history has played a major role in his career, culminating recently in a series of paintings for the U. S. Army. Currently, he is a business partner in a marketing and military history-based business, Noble Lancer Productions, LLC.



T/5 Albert M. Valenzi
Germany, 1945

The following appeared in the Sewickley Herald, March 15, 1945.

LOCAL SOLDIER FEIGNS DEATH

Sergeant Albert Valenzi, of 323 Logan Street, was one of the Yanks who escaped death by feigning death last December when Nazi soldiers turned machine guns and pistols on 100 American prisoners of war during the early days of the German counter-offensive near Malmédy, Belgium.

Sergeant Valenzi, who had two bullet holes in each leg, lay among the dead bodies of his comrades while Nazis went among them shooting those who moaned or moved. Then, after the Nazis had left, he and a few others reached safety. Of his experience, Sergeant Valenzi said, "The thoughts which ran through my mind as I lay there and prayed, and prayed and prayed, you can't imagine. I saw newsreels the other day of what happened to my outfit, but I couldn't bear to look at them. This story should open a lot of people's eyes—people who don't realize there is a war."

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

The following is excerpted from a Penn State press release, which was printed in the September 2013 newsletter of the North Hills Genealogists. There are three maps of Sewickley in the collection: 1895, 1900 and 1911.

NEW ONLINE RESOURCE EXCITES GENEALOGISTS, URBAN PLANNERS, AND MORE

Rich with valuable and detailed information, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps—originally created more than a century ago as a product to help insurance companies assess the potential risks involved in underwriting policies—have developed into a tool with myriad uses by researchers in multiple fields. Whether tracing turn-of-the-century city expansion, looking for the home of an ancestor, or researching boundaries and zoning ordinances, the Sanborn maps are a key source of reliable data.

Recently Penn State's University Libraries completed the cataloging and digitization of the entire collection of Sanborn maps that span the late 19th and early 20th centuries—31,036 sheets, representing 585 large and small communities across the Commonwealth. Titles published before 1923 and available online to the public are presented in an alphabetical index of Pennsylvania communities at www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/digital/sanborn.html. As copyright restrictions are lifted for post-1922 titles, the scanned images of those communities also will be mounted on the Maps Library's Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps website for use.

Surveyor D. A. Sanborn founded the company in New York City in 1867 to create special maps to aid companies in assessing liability for fire insurance coverage of buildings. The map sheets that cover each community accurately show the location of buildings and outbuildings, including details such as where windows and doors are positioned, as well as property boundaries, the names of land and company owners, the width of streets and sidewalks, building use and, most importantly, the construction materials used for homes, businesses, and other buildings. Key local industries were sometimes highlighted with inset maps, and textual notes added useful information such as the type of water supply and firefighting equipment and companies available. Other useful tidbits of information found on these maps include population figures, street and building indexes, and even prevailing winds!

Originally called the D. A. Sanborn National Insurance Diagram Bureau, the company went through several name changes. It was incorporated in 1876 as the Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, and after acquiring rival Perris and Browne in 1899, it was known as the Sanborn-Perris Map Company, Ltd., thus allowing it to trace its lineage to the year 1852. The name was later shortened in 1902 to its best-known moniker, the Sanborn Map Company.

A complete research guide for the Sanborn and other fire insurance maps is available at:

www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/researchguides/sanbornmaps.html.

Friends, Sponsors, Patrons, Benefactors

Thanks to the following, who have generously supported
Sewickley Valley Historical Society
with gifts in addition to membership dues:

Maleet B. Gordon; Lori Kastan; Andrew & Daleen Nimick;
Joe Zemba; Mrs. Mary Zemba

New Members

Andrew & Daleen Nimick, Moon Township

A Special Thank You

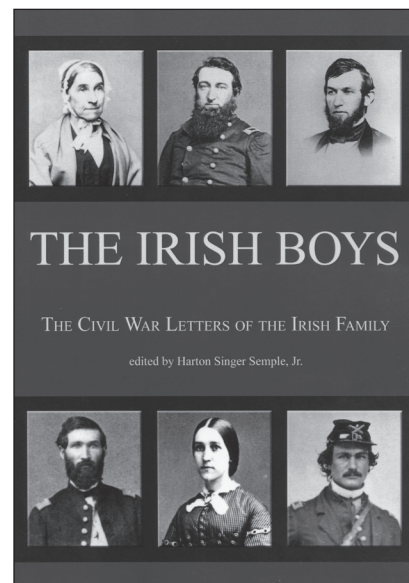
to R. Bruce Williamson, Inc.,
for repair of the lighting in
SVHS's diorama of the Wilpen Hall Library

The Irish Boys

Sewickley Valley Historical Society Executive Director Harton Semple's new book, *The Irish Boys: The Civil War Letters of the Irish Family*, is now available. It relates the history of a prominent Pennsylvania family through the record left in letters written during the Civil War by four soldier boys—three brothers and a cousin—and answered from home by family members.

The 501 page softbound book can be purchased through the website www.theirishboys.org or at the Penguin Bookshop in Sewickley.

Mr. Semple will discuss the book in the SVHS program at the Sewickley Heights History Center on Wednesday, March 19, 2014, at 7:30 p.m.



The following article by Lawrence M' Donald, which appeared in The Gazette Times Home Journal on June 8, 1918, was written in anticipation of a huge ordnance plant on Neville Island that was never constructed.

Gia Tatone and Dan Holland write in their book *Neville Island (Arcadia Publishers' Images of America Series, 2008)*:

"Due to its location along a low-lying flood plain of the Ohio River, Neville Island was ideally suited for farming.... [It] was known for many years as the 'Gem of the Ohio' due to the fertile land. By 1880, there were more than 40 working farms on the island.... Neville Island supplied some of the most celebrated produce in the United States.... The island's largest land-use transformation occurred in 1918, when the federal government's war department announced that the nation's largest ordnance plant, operated by U. S. Steel Corporation, was to be constructed on Neville Island at a cost of \$50 million.... [The] war department acquired 130 acres from farm owners for \$8.7 million for construction.... [The plant] was dubbed the 'floating factory.' But just as quickly as it was announced, World War I ended, and construction of the ordnance plant was abandoned.... [F]armers fought fiercely to keep their land, but the land was put up for sale at a price much higher than they could afford. U. S. Steel Corporation outbid the farmers, some of whom [had] owned their land for 100 years. Thus by 1921, the transformation of the great 'Market Basket of Pittsburgh' into an industrial center was complete."

Neville Island Gardens to Give Way to Great U. S. Ordnance Plant

Uncle Sam's "Yankee Doodle" new garden on Neville Island will yield ordinance [sic] instead of onions, artillery instead of asparagus, and rifles instead of radishes. Potatoes will give way to projectiles, tomatoes to tanks and carrots to cannon. A daily crop is scheduled instead of a yearly one. The products will make fodder of the Hun. This plant will be no night-blooming cereus.

Here is to be assembled one of the mightiest gun plants in the world, perhaps larger than the famous works of the Krupps, and designed for a nobler ambition than perpetuating a cruel autocracy. The United States Steel Corporation will build and operate the plant for the government.

Both channels of the Ohio River will be lined with long wharfs. New railroad bridges will span the north and back channels. To these quays will come fleets of river boats. Cargoes of guns, field and sea rifles, coast defense and seige [sic]

artillery will go up and down the river. Much will reach the Gulf ports to be reloaded into sea-going vessels for distribution.

This will be for the period of this war, and until America stores away enough for every possible defense against another breaking out of national human greed. But when the red flame of war gives way to the kindling of peace fires and when the flags of nations are folded and pledged for a perpetual union for democracy's safety, swords will be refashioned into plowshares.

Neville Island will then be devoted to the pursuits of patriotic industrialism. The plant can be used as railroad shops for building and repairing steam highways and their equipments [sic], looking

to the likelihood of the nation taking over the railroads permanently.

Projectiles will also be turned out in large quantities. The guns to be made will be one and [one] half times larger than the types of those made in the Bethlehem works, the Midvale, the Washington Navy Yard and the Watervliet Arsenal. The forgings for the guns will be 70 feet long. The lathes will be 160 feet in length, with lathe plates 10 feet in diameter....

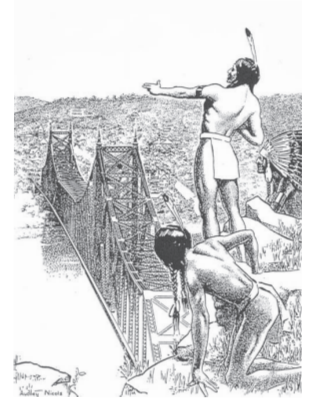


Massive yards for the storage of material are being constructed since May 4. Kitchens and bunking quarters are being built for workmen. The builders will not confess that this work is being done for the government, but in view of the nation taking over the whole island, stone, gravel, building material, coal, accommodations for workmen, will be immediately at hand, [so] that there will be no de-

lay in getting the big gun plant into action for the world war. The appraisal committee, made up mainly of Pittsburgh real estate men who are familiar with acreage prices, are [sic] appraising the island and fixing ground figures, looking to facilitating the government's taking over all titles....

When the plant is completed and in operation it will be probably the largest arsenal in the world; and most likely the headquarters of the Ordnance Department of the nation will be in Pittsburgh. Here will be located the experts of the Allied nations, Italy, France and others, whose master mechanics and finished craftsmen in gun making will assist America in subjugating the murderous Hun.

November 2013



Mystery Solved

The statue of Fame in Sewickley Cemetery remembers sacrifices by Valley men in War of the Rebellion. Raised in 1866 and replaced in granite in 2005, it is inscribed with the names of 28 men. All have been identified except an L. B. Garner, listed among the names of those who “died of wounds and disease.” No service or pension records could be found for this individual.

Recently, the Historical Society obtained a scrapbook of clippings from Pittsburgh newspapers containing a lengthy article entitled “Stories of Soldiers’ Monuments in Allegheny County, Sewickley Commemoration,” from *The Gazette Times Home Journal*, March 24, 1918. In it, George T. Fleming, a prominent historian of the day, describes the ceremony dedicating the Fame monument and then explains the service and the circumstances of the passing of each of the individuals listed on the monument.

Fleming notes that “Lewis B. Carner was a young carpenter working in Sewickley when the war broke out. His home was in Butler

County, Pennsylvania. He wanted to enlist early in the war, but was prevented for various reasons, but when the call for 300,000 more volunteers came in July, 1862, he promptly enlisted in Com-

pany G, One Hundred and Thirty-ninth Pennsylvania, under Capt. E. M. Jenkins.... Carner was a good soldier. He was promoted to corporal May 5, 1863, wounded in the battle of the Wilderness, Virginia, May 5, 1864, and again at the battle of the Opequon, Virginia, September 18, 1864, from the effects of which he died, November 25, 1864. His remains were taken to his former home in Butler County. When it comes to distorting proper names in print one can find a conspicuous example

in Carner’s, as it appears Garner, Gainer and even Lewis B. C. Armer. However, Sewickley people, especially his comrade, Corporal Clark Hamilton, Company G, One Hundred and Thirty-ninth Pennsylvania, a Sewickley soldier, knew his right name and his good service record.”

So now all the names inscribed on the statue of Fame in Sewickley are identified.

