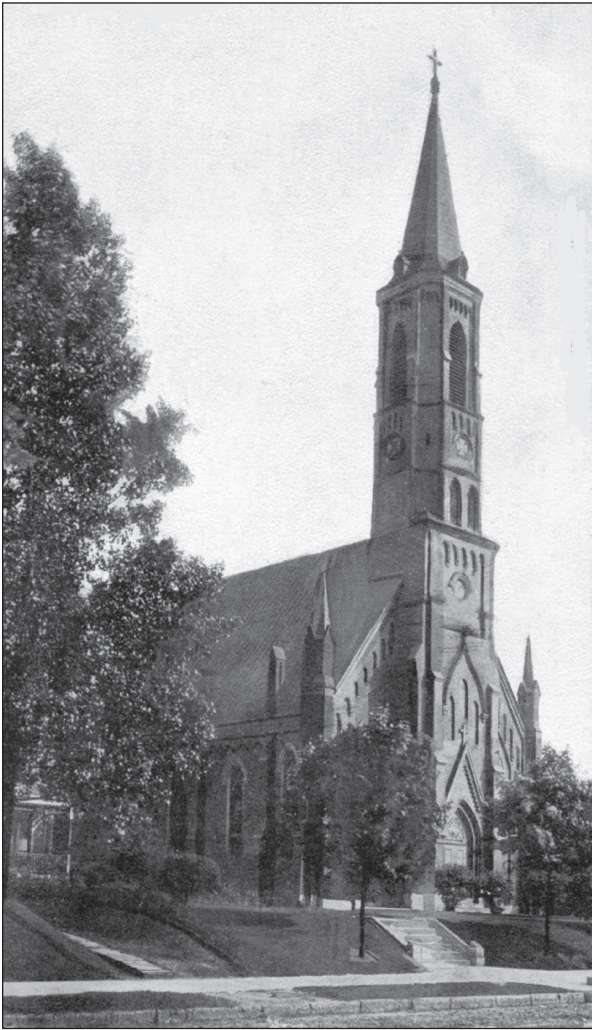


Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

XLI, Number 2

October 2013



Old St. James Church, dedicated November 24, 1870

Wednesday, October 23, 2013

7:30 p.m.

Old Sewickley Post Office

Reflections: The History of St. James Church, 1863-2013

A Presentation by Gloria G. Berry

For the past year, Sewickley's St. James Parish has been celebrating its 150th Anniversary and the 100th Anniversary of St. James School. Formally established in 1863, the church has grown from a congregation of less than 100 parishioners to a parish that now numbers nearly 5,000 members.

Gloria G. Berry, an Incorporator of Sewickley Valley Historical Society and a former President, serves at present as church historian for St. James. She will attempt to guide us through the centuries, showing us the growth and development of the parish from the 1800s to the present day. A life-long resident of the Sewickley Valley, she has resided in the Borough of Edgeworth for 50 years.

Gloria's love of history developed in her early childhood when she remembers listening to her mother, father and grandparents relate colorful and detailed stories of our country, the state of Pennsylvania, the city

of Pittsburgh and especially the Sewickley Valley. A graduate of Mount Mercy College (now Carlow University) with a B.A. and Northwestern University where she received an M.A., she continued post-graduate studies at Northwestern, being admitted to candidacy for a doctoral degree with a concentration in history. Her interest in history has continued through the years and led to her chairing the Research Committee for the *Dedication Book – The History of St. James* (1968) for the opening of the new St. James Church.

In the 1970s, she co-chaired, along with B. G. Shields, the Sewickley Valley Bicentennial Committee. In 1977, she was named coordinator of the Committee to Save the Sewickley Bridge. It was during the early days of the Bridge Campaign that she was asked to research and write the history of the 1911 bridge in support of the many communities' need for a new structure.

Gloria and her husband of 56 years, Dr. George J. Berry, are the parents of two sons: George J. III, who served as President of Sewickley Valley Historical Society, and William G. Berry.

Refreshments will be served following the presentation.

The mission of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society
is to promote interest in and to record, collect, preserve, and document the history of the Sewickley Valley.

The two articles that follow appeared in The Valley Gossip, Sewickley's first magazine, published by Gilbert Adams Hays (1854-1934) in twelve monthly issues between December 1880 and December 1881. Betty Ann Miller recently presented SVHS with a full run of the journal. "Our Village and Valley" appeared in December 1880; "Sewickley's Cave", in March 1881. The often quirky punctuation in the articles is transcribed from the originals. The photo of the Bell Rocks Cave in the second article is from the Historical Society's Way Collection. Hays, a son of General Alexander Hays, was one of the pioneers of Sewickley journalism. In addition to The Valley Gossip, he was responsible in 1895 for the first number of The Sewickley Valley, a weekly that ran for 17 years, and wrote "Tales from the Flicker's Nest," a series of short articles on local history that appeared in the Sewickley Herald beginning in 1910.

Our Village and Valley

SEWICKLEY OUTLINED, ANALYSED, CENSUSED AND GENERALLY DISCUSSED

The valley of Sewickley extends from Aleppo on the east to Economy on the west, a distance of several miles, not in a straight line.

Aleppo is—but any good scholar knows where Aleppo is. It's where they raise figs. Also water cures. In spite of its name, there hasn't been a leper seen there. All water cured.

Economy deserves a passing notice. Our parents and teachers insist that the road to wealth lies through Economy. Now we know positively that Economy is on the Fort Wayne road. Also that the latter isn't the road to wealth, but to Chicago. See how easily it is for good people to be mistaken!

To return to Sewickley, (return trip 35 cents.) Its first habitable building was a church, and its name was derived from the Indian word signifying "Sugar Water." That these statements are true, seems certain, or else, how shall we account for the religious fervor of the Sewickleyan of to-day, and for the surpassing sweetness of the Sewickley woman, maid, matron or widow. For once, history, so to speak, has a "level" head.

The earliest Sewickleyan was liable to attacks on his scalp, from painted savages. The Sewickleyan of the present is equally liable to a tax upon his property by mild mannered assessors and collectors. This demonstrates the truth of the saying that history repeats itself.

And, further, while Sewickley is happily free from the racket of mills and factories, she yet encourages her tax-payers to the extent of several mills on the dollar...

The noble nature of the men who enjoy citizenship in Sewickley may be judged from the fact that the fellow who is a "regular" on the "Express" in the morning and on the "Erie" in the evening, frequently (sometimes oftener) unbends and even fraternizes with the hard working man who goes up at 7 and don't [sic] return until 7:20. At the same time all Sewickleyans are disposed to fittingly rebuke the sordid soul who lives in a house without a bay window.

It is sad to admit, on the other hand, that one creature remains utterly unregenerate and hopelessly bad even amid the regenerating influences of Sewickley. It's the gas meter. He has retained the worst habits of the most depraved of his kind, and marks off the unconsumed gas under the very droppings of the sanctuary, in the cellar of the divine as well as in the sumptuous basement of the plumber and butcher.

Sewickley, happy in the possession of her specific gravity, no machinery, water works, drinks ... with a calm sense of superiority in this respect, and happy in the knowledge that no liquor is sold in

the borough, nor bar tolerated (outside the river.) Isolated cases, however, have existed, where the stuff has been given away. But we won't give it away.

Historically, Sewickley's early days (and nights) were full of interest. Somebody has borrowed our work detailing this phase in the life of the place and so we will have to be brief and concise in this respect. But in 1752, or thereabouts, one George Washington marched through the maple grove where Sewickley now stands. This great man murmured, as he marked a big tree, (the mark is there yet, if the tree is,) with his (little) hatchet, "I can not tell a lie (father,) this is a lovely, an heavenly place." And to this day Sewickley is a Nevinly place. (The audience is requested to keep their seats).

One hundred short years afterwards, the railroad was built which to-day enables Sewickleyans to call their place a suburb of Pittsburgh. Which is a mighty good thing for Pittsburgh.

While not advocating the theory that when good Pittsburghers die they go to Sewickley, we firmly and unflinchingly hold to the statement that sensible and intelligent Pittsburghers, during life move to Sewickley, and when they die they secure a lot in one of the most healthfully located cemeteries in the country. For further particulars, apply to the gentleman in charge. (This isn't a paid notice.)

The only industries that so far have obtained a footing in Sewickley are three, to wit: boat-building, match-making and church festivals. The first is carried on during daylight. The second is conducted chiefly by starlight, moonlight, gaslight or lamplight. Provided always that the lady's mother doesn't object and her father is good natured and wears light boots. Parlor matches are usually made, with a liberal sprinkling of front gate and picnic matches, according to the season of the year. The church festival and supper business flourishes all the year around, and those interested have made enough money in a single season to give every timid, virtuous Indian in the far West a worked smoking cap, a pair of Java canvas slippers and an embroidered pin cushion, and to provide a set of furs for the wife of every missionary in the tract-less wastes of Central Africa!

During the one hundred years alluded to above, several things happened in Sewickley. A boys' Academy and a girls' Seminary flourished for years. Finally the boys grew up and married all the girls, and so both institutions ceased from off the face of the earth. (For further particulars confer with Revs. J.S.T., [Joseph S. Travelli] or D.E.N. [Daniel Eagle Nevin])

About the beginning of the present century the Nevin family moved to Sewickley, and even at this late day it is by no means an uncommon sight to meet an occasional Nevin in the village or valley.

At a still later day a Kindergarten was established and still exists. But Sewickley has proved so good a place to be born in that our statistician swears (figuratively speaking, of course,) that the “Kinders” outnumber the “Gartens” fifty to one.

This leads us to recall the fact that every married Sewickleyan is met at the depot during the summer months by at least one baby carriage and passenger, insomuch that the station is hemmed about with perambulators. Further, that the occupant of every carriage thrives on the knowledge of the fact that he (or she) is a Sewickleyan, and that when he (or she) grows up to have whiskers

(or bangs) he (or she) will marry some other Sewickleyan and live and die in Sewickley.

But why pursue the pleasing topic? As we have intimated some reprobate has borrowed our history of Sewickley (revised by R.P.N. [Robert Peebles Nevin]) If “dates” are wanted, go to him. If figs, go to—Aleppo.

Summed up, and in conclusion, Sewickley possesses a choicer article of atmosphere, better gas, purer water, finer natural drainage, nobler divines, smarter newspaper men, and lawyers, and railroaders, abler doctors, sweeter women, ditto girls, healthier babies (and more of them) than any other village in the broad Commonwealth of Pennsylvania!

Sewickley's Cave

Sewickley, like most pretty towns supplied with every attraction, possesses a cave. It's rather a big cave. It is bigger than Soldene's mouth*, but not quite so big as the Mammoth Cave, of Kentucky. But then Kentucky hasn't got any Nevin family, or any Jersey Little**, nor any Mendelssohn Club, nor... debating society like the “Church Aid,” nor several other things we might mention. So much the worse for Kentucky.

Sewickley's cave is not a geological curiosity; simply the result of a great slide of rock from the hill back of the village, and a short distance west of the reservoir. The sandstone parted during some pre-historic convulsion of nature, and the cave is simply a great crack in the rock. Only a fissure. But it does not follow that there's any fish there. There are no stalactites nor stalagmites, nor River Styx. But there are wooden sticks, and bats, and beetles (in season) and lots of good honest dark—in short, just as good an article of dark as can be found in the remotest corner of the biggest cave of the globe.

Away back in 1853-58, when the present wives and young matrons of our village were cutting their teeth, making mud pies, and getting spanked by long-suffering parents, the cave was the object of much interest to Mr. Travelli's “Academy boys.” A Saturday afternoon excursion to the cave was an event full of mystery to the young chaps. Led by “Professor” A. M. Reid (now head of the Steubenville Seminary), the lads of the Academy would climb the big hill,

and gather about the mouth of the cavern in shoals. Bits of candle were distributed, lit, and an exploration of the interior made by the entire school. Looking back over the years which intervene, the impression still lingers that there wasn't enough cave to go around. There ought have been more cave and less boy, or fewer boys for

the size of the subterranean crack. But there was lots of fun, anyhow, and if any fellow could start the theory that there was a boy missing and lost in the cave, the holiday's excursion was extended by a vigorous search, and the element danger, dearly loved by boys, made perfect the afternoon's enjoyment.

We can learn of no recent explorations of this interesting place. Are the Sewickley boys of to-day less intrepid than were their fathers in 1853?



Fred Way III with Betsy Ann at Bell Rocks, Sewickley, in the 1930s

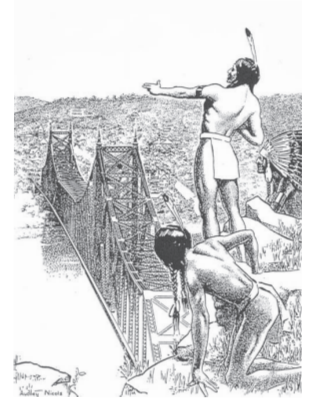
* *Emily Soldene (1838 -1912) was one of the most famous comic opera singers of the late 19th century. She was widely admired in the United States and abroad for her mezzo soprano voice as well as her generous mouth, which led one critic to claim that it would take two men to kiss her.*

** *Capt. Fred Way, Jr., wrote, “Little Sewickley Creek was diverted ca. 1871 immediately at the stone culvert below Shields PRR station (old one); formerly it wound up between RR and river thence to Quaker Valley Station. I have heard that Jersey Little was the contractor who made the diversion; he dug through a ditch one day, and that night came a ‘gulley-washer’ storm, and the creek put itself through.”*

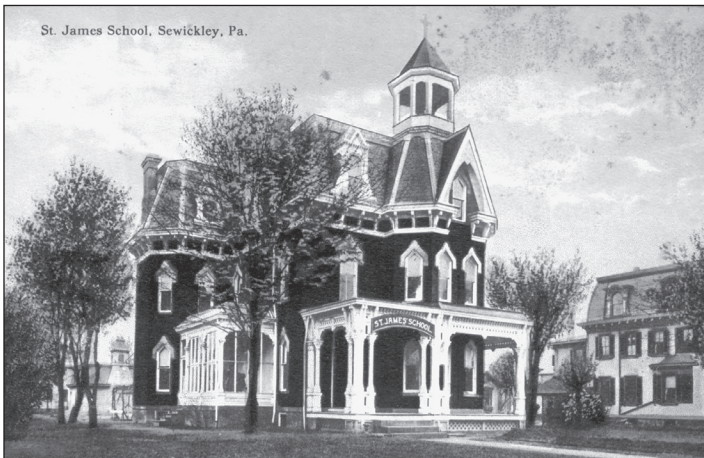
Sewickley Valley Historical Society
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October 2013



St. James School



The first school building of St. James Parish was dedicated in 1913, with an enrollment of 80 students. The three-story, late nineteenth century Gothic mansion on Broad Street was purchased from David C. Herbst. The bell and tower seen in the postcard reproduced here were added to the house and have since been removed. The building was later used as a convent. The new St. James school was dedicated in 1954.

Friends, Sponsors, Patrons, Benefactors

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

Dr. & Mrs. George J. Berry; Mr. & Mrs. Connor M. Cogswell;
Cordelia Glenn; Kaisa Hall;
The Rev. & Mrs. Lawrence Knotts; Mr. & Mrs. Tom Melisko;
Tom & Jebby Potter; Mr. & Mrs. E. S. Ruffin;
Ann W. Schroeder; Sewickley Cemetery; Phyllis Thomas;
Mr. & Mrs. Hartley P. Walker

New Members

Kaisa Hall, Sewickley; Lois Howanec, Mount Joy, PA;
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