

Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

XL, Number 6

April 2013

Wednesday, April 17, 2013

7:30 p.m.

at

Sewickley Heights History Center

1901 Glen Mitchell Road, Sewickley, PA 15143 — (412) 741-4487

Rivers of Steel: The Sewickley Connection

A Presentation by Sherris Moreira

SHERRIS MOREIRA is the Director of Marketing & Tourism Development with Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area and Director of Rivers of Steel Heritage Tours. Though she didn't expect her degree in English Literature to lead her to a decade in the journalism field and five years as creator/editor of a women's magazine, as well as her current position encompassing steel heritage and heritage tourism, she appreciates the exceptional opportunities that have come from it. Ms. Moreira also serves as vice-president of Destination: Greater Pittsburgh, a group

tourism promotional organization; marketing committee member of HeritagePA, a statewide representative organization that promotes the twelve heritage areas in Pennsylvania; and a board member of the Westminster College Alumni Association in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania. Her presentation will explore the connection between the Sewickley area and Pittsburgh's heyday of steel—from B. F. Jones of J & L Steel to Henry Oliver of Oliver Iron and Steel Company.

RIVERS OF STEEL HERITAGE CORPORATION conserves, interprets and develops historical, cultural and recreational resources throughout western Pennsylvania, including the eight counties that comprise the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area. The dynamic and powerful story of the region's evolution from colonial settlement to "Big Steel" to the modern era is evident in its many artifacts, buildings, vibrant communities and industrial sites. Rivers of Steel seeks to link our colonial and industrial heritage to the present and future economic and cultural life of the region and the communities it serves. Its vision is to become a nationally recognized brand that not only celebrates our past but also embraces our future, by connecting people to their environs. To achieve these ends, it fosters and promotes resource conservation and development, heritage tourism, cultural and educational programs and economic revitalization in partnership with hundreds of local communities in the greater Pittsburgh area, and along the Monongahela, Allegheny and Ohio River valleys, the very places that gave birth to the most powerful industrial heartland the world has ever seen.



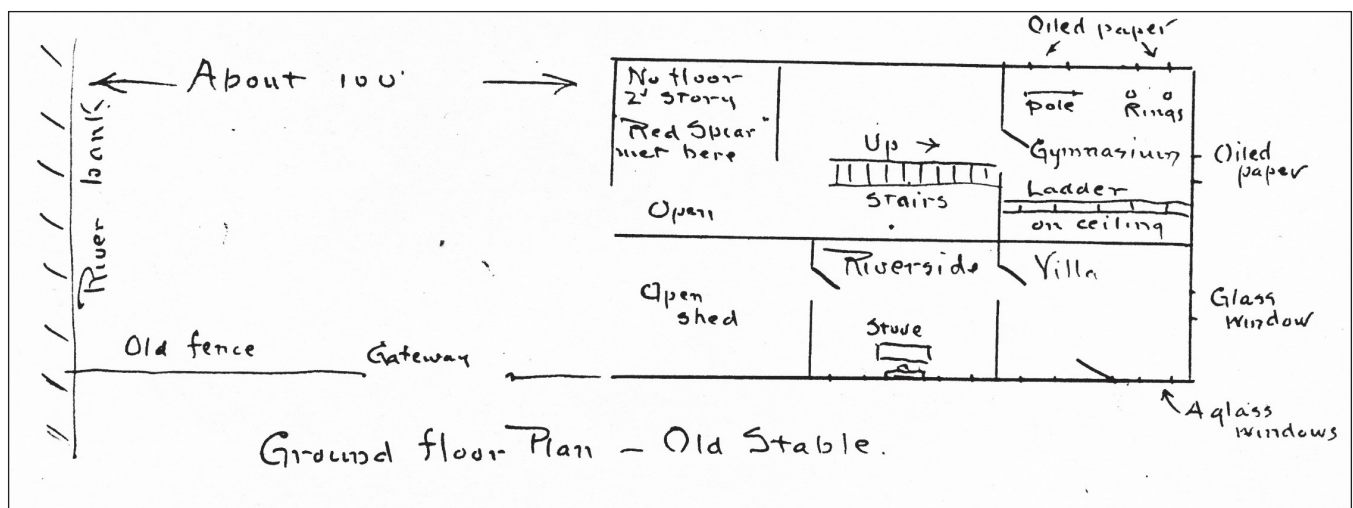
The mission of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society
is to promote interest in and to record, collect, preserve, and document the history of the Sewickley Valley.

The Old Stable

The following is excerpted from a "rambling boyhood chronicle, set down in piecemeal and from time to time, during the winter of 1923-24, by Franklin T. Nevin, commonly (and irreverently) called by his children, 'Fed'." The 23-page typed manuscript and the "Sewickley Junior Athletes & Sportsmen" notebook, a page of which is illustrated here, were part of a collection of material donated to the Sewickley Valley Historical Society by Hugh and Eliza Nevin. Some of the reminiscences were included in Nevin's *The Village of Sewickley*, published by The Sewickley Printing-Shop in 1929, reprinted by The Sewickley Herald in 1978 and, again, recently, by the Sewickley Valley Historical Society.

Franklin Taylor Nevin was born in 1867, the youngest child of Theodore Hugh and Hannah Irwin Nevin. He was married to Elizabeth B. Miller, and they had three children—Henry Miller Nevin, Margaret Williamson Nevin and Franklin Taylor Nevin, Jr. (who died at age ten). This chronicle was written for Henry and Margaret. Franklin Taylor Nevin died in 1939.

Nevin's account begins with a description of the red brick house in which he was born and spent his boyhood, a house built for his father in 1863. It was on seven acres, running from the Ft. Wayne railroad tracks (where Ohio River Boulevard is today) down to the low water mark on the Ohio River, with the J. Sharp McDonald property to the east and the Murdoch property to the west. He goes on to describe the grounds and outbuildings, finally coming to the "Old Stable."



"THE OLD STABLE!" Now we are on hallowed ground! Here was the center of all of our activities. Here we reigned supreme. It had formerly been called The White Stable, but that was before my time. When Father lived in the Murdoch house, before the red brick was built, this stable, I suppose, had some connection with that place. In all the years that I knew and loved it, it was abandoned for all practical purposes and was taken over by the younger generation. It was nearly square, the part toward the river in somewhat ruinous condition, below and above, and standing open to the breeze. There were the remains of painted inscriptions here and there, partly legible, dating from the reign of my older brothers. Two of the ground floor rooms were finished and ceiled and contained a kitchen range. In these my sister Mame (your Aunt Mary Booth) and her girl friends had kept house, cooked meals and given parties. "Riverside Villa" they called it....

Following the heyday of Riverside Villa came the reign of "our crowd." We ran largely to secret societies and gymnasiums. My earliest recollection of the place is of a solemn conclave held by three or four of us in an unfloored room in the second story where we sat astride the joists and gazed in silence at a red painted wooden arrow which was nailed to an upright staff in the middle of the room. "The Red Spear" was the name of the Society—and that is all I remember about it. I suppose I must have been five or six years old. Later followed more ambitious—if not

more mystical organizations which met in a long dark room at the head of the steep narrow stairs. You had to jump down a few feet to get into the lodge-room. ("Meeting room," we called it). I wonder who designed that building! He certainly had an eye to the requirements of youngsters. Floors at different levels, mysterious trap doors here and there 'n everything! All the cracks in the walls of the meeting room were carefully sealed up that no light might get in. There were no windows. When light was needed you threw open the small square door at the end of the room which gave out onto—nothing. It was a pretty stiff jump excepting in the spring when the mud was soft. In this dark and mysterious room we held the initiations....

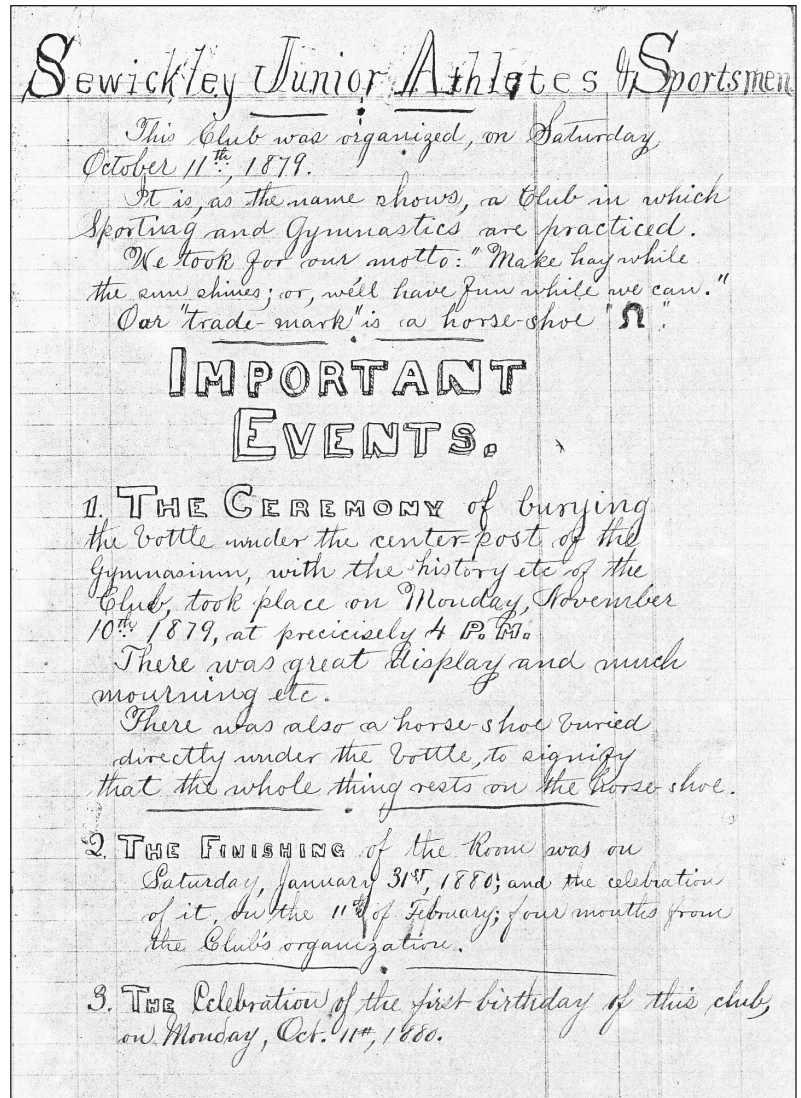
Our membership was small and select.... Never over six or eight, I should say—mostly Murdochs. The name of the Society? Various and sundry. You see there were frequent changes, for a member now and then got "mad" at the bunch and deserted, which made a change of name necessary, to preserve secrecy. The name was never spoken—only the initials. "C.S.T.A." was one. I've no idea now what the letters stood for. One of the highest sounding ones was "Mystic Heroes of Sewickley"—"M.H.S." to the general. (Don't laugh!) I went down to see Dr. Bittinger of the Presbyterian Church and learned from him the Greek equivalents of M. H. S. which we entered in the Proceedings of the Society, together with the Constitution and By-Laws—but we never attained much

proficiency in Greek. "M.H.S." was good enough for everyday use. I don't remember how often we met or why—or what we did—except to sit in the twilit lodgeroom and talk in low whispers. There was an official position for every member but one, from Grandmaster down through Secretary and Treasurer, filled by election at stated intervals. The unfortunate member who temporarily held no office was called the "chairman" because he sat in the lone chair at the end of the line. That is what we thought "chairman" meant....

Following the era of pass-word and countersign came the physical culture craze—though we didn't know it by that name. "Muscle worship," you might call it. Though we were constantly on the go, all day long, busy with baseball, shinny [street hockey], skating or swimming, in season, we felt the need of "regular exercise"; took up Indian clubs, boxing (with home-made gloves), running and jumping. I would get up before six o'clock in the morning, meet Alex Adair or one of the Murdochs (Heaven knows how early Alex must have risen! [The Adairs lived in Edgeworth!]) and run off a measured mile around the pear-shaped "circle" of our driveway. Then "a cold shower, a rub-down and a hearty breakfast"—so the training directions ran. Sister Lide gave me a rough, unbleached Turkish towel for my rub. We realized though that what we needed to keep us fit was a gymnasium. Naturally, we turned to the Old Stable, and there, to our hand, was the long dirt-floored room under our old "meeting room." It required only the tearing down of some old cow stalls, the rooting up of some heavy stones and the leveling off in preparation for the layer of sawdust. For some reason we called it the "roomi"—tho' why the "i", I can't say. Perhaps to distinguish it from our former room upstairs. We worked at the job like nailers, for weeks, after school hours—Hugh, Dave and Floyd Murdoch, Alex Adair and I.

Hugh dropped out, "mad" and the remaining four of us, when the gym was completed, organized the "S.J.A. and S." Sewickley Junior Athletes and Sportsmen! The four members were designated by letter—Dave was "S", I was "J", Floyd [was] "A", [and] Alex [was] "and S". The room was kept under padlock and each of us carried a key. Inside, the sawdust covered floor—two windows on the west wall and one on the north "glazed" with oiled wrapping paper. There was a turning pole where one cow stall had been and beside it a pair of swinging rings. Our prize bit of equipment was the ladder that was nailed to the ceiling—along which you traveled by hand, raising the worst blisters you ever saw. In the center of the roomi we planted a stout timber post to strengthen the ceiling. Before setting this up we solemnly buried under it a bottle containing a paper with our names, the name of the Society, date of its organization—October 11th, 1879, etc. How do I remember the date? Well, you know, certain important dates always stick in one's memory. Like 1066, 1492, 1776, etc. Years after, in 1886, to be exact, the Old Stable was torn down and I dug up the bottle, took out the paper, sent it around to the former members to be re-signed—and then buried it again in the same location, where I suppose it remains to this day. (We were always burying something or other....) Outside, near the river bank, we put up a flying-horse, a big plank with a hole in the center, revolving on a post and well daubed with axle-grease. And how sick some of the younger kids got when they rode on it! We never seemed to lack boards or planks or posts as we needed them. Father apparently had plenty of building material lying about, ready to hand. Then, always, there was "Old Man Harbaugh's" board pile, down the Lane, to draw upon. We considered lumber public property, like fruit.

But, I mustn't let the Old Stable crowd everything else off the map. There was The River....

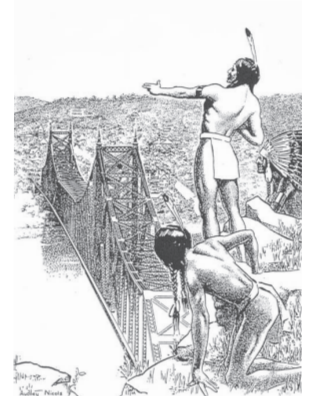


This is the first page of the S.J.A. & S. notebook. Other pages list "Rules & Regulations," "Minutes," the "Roll," "Sanitary Rules," "By Laws," and "Monthly Reports of the Treasurer." Although Nevin, in these reminiscences, says that Hugh Jamison Murdoch (1865-1919) dropped out of the organization, he is listed in the roll as President. The other members were Franklin Taylor Nevin, Secretary; John Floyd Murdoch (1869-1930), Treasurer; and Alec [Alexander] William Adair (1867-1902), whom Nevin calls "Alex." David Kerr Murdoch (1867-1913), another of the Murdoch brothers, is the "Dave" referred to in the account.

Sewickley Valley Historical Society
200 Broad Street
Sewickley, PA 15143

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April 2013



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

Carole Moore Ford; Mr. & Mrs. Raymond V. Shepherd, Jr.

Donations in Memory of Stephen C. Davis, Sr.

Maria Bleicher; Mr. & Mrs. Fitzhugh Brown; Frances Love Merryman; Mary Beth Pastorius; Mr & Mrs. Harton S. Semple, Jr.;
Mrs. D. Leet Shields; Pauline O. Walker; Village Garden Club of Sewickley

In Memoriam

Stephen C. Davis, Sr.

Report of the Nominating Committee

The Sewickley Valley Historical Society Nominating Committee
(Maleet Gordon, Chair; Brewster Cockrell; Wayne Murphy; Agnes Pangburn; Dan Telep)
proposes the following slate of officers and directors for election to a two-year term
at the SVHS Annual Meeting, May 15, 2013:

President: Mike Tomana

Vice President: Connor Cogswell

Directors: David Genter, Daniel Telep, Debra Thornton