

Sewickley Valley Historical Society

Signals

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February 2013

Wednesday, February 20, 2013

7:30 p.m.

Old Sewickley Post Office

The Shaker-Harmony Society Encounter

a lecture by Walter A. Brumm, Ph.D.

Walter A. Brumm, Ph.D., President of the Friends of Old Economy Village, holds degrees from Wittenberg College, Kent State University and The Ohio State University. His interest in communal societies began with a term paper project focusing on the Shakers, expanded to the role of religion in social upheavals and led to his dissertation, which was concerned with how the American public viewed the Shakers from 1774-1799. His interest in the Harmony Society began with a faculty grant to do research at Old Economy Village, and it led to his discovery of the Shaker-Harmonist connection—which began with a wine label and exploded into archival research.

Dr. Brumm consciously uses the word “encounter” rather than “meeting” in the title of his presentation. From the first recorded

contact, the Shakers and the Harmonists found mutual benefit in long-term interaction, but neither could find a common cause. When it came to business activities, they found a great deal of commonality; but in terms of their visions for the future, they remained far apart.

What, then, propelled the Shaker-Harmonist relationship, and what is their place in American history? Where do both groups fit into the history of the socialist and communist movements of the nineteenth century? And does any of it really matter today?

These are some of the questions Dr. Brumm will answer in his presentation. Please join us! Refreshments will follow the lecture.

The following is excerpted from a charming sketch prepared and read by Agnes Milnor Hays Gormly (1847-1908) before the Twentieth Century Club of Pittsburgh and the Woman's Club of Sewickley Valley. Mrs. Gormly was a daughter of Gen. Alexander Hays. The sketch was published from the original manuscript in 1910 by Gilbert Adams Hays, Mrs. Gormly's brother. "An intimacy extending over three generations of the [Hays] family, and almost daily contact, with most cordial relations, as nearest neighbors for six years, with the advantage of speaking the German language fluently, gave Mrs. Gormly exceptional opportunity of observing the quaint customs and manners of the Harmony Society, or 'Economites,' as they were more familiarly called."

ECONOMY;

AN UNIQUE COMMUNITY

(The Harmony Society)

Economy? Not the economy dinned into most of us from our youth up, so suggestive of turned gowns, steamed velvets, cleaned gloves and their host of attendant shabbinesses, but an Economy of old brocades; of precious dark blue “Lafayette” china; of dark dull red brick houses with the velvety look that three score and ten years of sunshine and rain alone could give; of a great stone-walled garden full of all-old world delights, of gleaming lake and clipped box hedges wherein grew luxuriantly the sweet flowers of our grandmothers, and where lavender and wallflowers elbowed

hollyhock and dahlia and ivy clung to the crumbling wall. Great meadows rich with corn and fretted with orchards and vineyards enbosom [sic] the village; sometimes one might even see in the shadow of some long-silent factory the profuse beauty of espaliered apricots.

High on the bluff of the Beautiful River dreamed the village under the shade of its fruit trees, and the days slipped by unmarked, except where in the “Friedof” [sic, *Friedhof*, cemetery] fresh ridges

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.

of brown earth or newly springing turf chronicled that Time had taken with him some silvery-haired brother or sister, full of years and good works.

Here Spring brought even gentler rain and lovelier flowers than elsewhere; the ivy sent out its pale green shoots; the streets were showered with falling petals of all tints, from the blush of the peach to the bridal snow of the cherry, and the air was full of pleasant odors.

When Summer came with its early dawns, you might have seen troops of rosy-cheeked boys and girls, each with a tiny three-legged stool, a tin cup and a blue bag—a delicious blue bag as far as color goes, tho' it held nothing more dainty than the prosaic "stuck brod," [sic, *stück brot*, piece of bread] which was to stay the infant stomach till the noonday meal. Apprentices, these, for this was a celibate community, and the shepherd of this chattering flock, a mild patriarch of at least four-score, habited in coat and trousers of dark faded blue, "a world too wide," his snowy locks surmounted by a "top hat" of straw, plaited a score or two of years ago by the busy fingers of some sister, as she rested from household cares, gravely followed in the rear of the procession.

The currants were to be picked, as had been duly set forth last evening on the black-board which hung on the side of the milk wagon, as it "pursued the even tenor of its way" through the quiet village streets. Next day perchance the cherries, hanging in scarlet masses from the trees lining every sidewalk, are to be gathered, or possibly the stronghold of the "bee-house," on the greensward back of the shoe shop, was to be plundered of its store of sweets.

If it were Autumn, then great carts, piled high with gayly tinted apples, or baskets heaped with the purple of grapes or russet of pears, went creaking by on their way to the huge presses, and the fragrance of crushed fruit penetrated the air of the press house.

Winter snows whitened all the wide still streets, the blue smoke curling from the chimneys, or mayhap an aged face peering over the banks of gay flowers which decked the broad-silled, white-curtained windows of almost every house, would be the only sign of life, unless one chanced on a flock of children chattering on their decorous way to or from school....

[S]uppose you slip back the tale of years until twenty-five are gone, and then come with me to Economy for a day or two.

We climb the steep ascent from the station, stopping at the top for a look at the old blanket and cloth mill just in front of us, see the bit of Frederick Rapp shown in the laurel wreath carved on the lintel around the date 1828, exclaim as you must, over the beauty of the river view, and then we trudge on, carrying our own packages, there

being no porters here, past the wall of the Great House, and along the church square, greeting any brother or sister you may meet shuffling along in capacious shoes, or cautiously closing one of the picket gates that guard each door-yard.... Just ahead of us is the Economy hotel, with Andy, the hostler, sitting on the bench outside the door. He looks much like a feather-less parrot dressed in Economy clothes, and is a trifle short tempered, but we call "Morgen," and step through the door almost into Joseph's arms. And what a greeting, and what questions! How are the Gormlys, and the Kings, and the widow Hays? And his white curls shine in the sunlight, and then a fat little figure dashes at us and actually puts his arm around us. He looks exactly like a very fat Cupid grown aged and bald, and is David the waiter, who almost cries with joy to see us. A door opens at one side of the long entry and before us stands Melena, dressed in the workaday costume of the "sisters," blue wolsley, faintly striped with red, short waisted, high shouldered, full skirted, a bewitching attempt at "surplice neck" is decorously filled in with exquisitely plaited linen ruffles and bounded in by a gayly bordered blue silk 'kerchief. A long black apron falls to her comfortably shod, very large feet, while the dearest old face, wrinkled, yet rosy, with soft blue eyes beams on us from a frame of high crowned blue cap. Her greeting brings Semira, stately enough for an empress, from her housekeeping, and then Rosie, grotesquely plain, (she looks just like a red earthen-ware crock,) and the helpers all come in and make us welcome, and we go up the stairs into a rather stuffy room but hurry back so as to do some sight-seeing before dinner, Joseph gravely warning us not to be late, as "we waits for nobody," and they do not....



As we walk along you notice what a dog-less town this is. To be sure the watchman has a mongrel companion on his nightly rounds, who spends his days galloping mildly at the end of a rope, strung trolley-fashion on a wire stretched between the grist mill and "the house that Jack built," in other words the huge granary where are to be found the malt, rats and cat of the ballad, while the cow with the crumpled horn feeds with many companions in the adjoining meadow....

[After a visit to the Silk house, laundry and grist mill] the church bell warns us that if we wish to escape Daniel's wrath we must fly to our dinner....

The table service at the hotel is primitive, although David does lean over your shoulder and beg you to eat a little more. Everything is plentiful and clean, but the meat is all boiled and the soup queer, with pitchers of delicious milk and dishes of fresh-laid eggs, plenty of jellies, (very good, unless Mr. Henrici has had some inspiration in the preserving line,) cucumbers stewed in cream, and snowballs, an apotheosized [sic] doughnut. You are expected to eat, not talk, and to leave the table as soon as you have finished, and it is bad manners to leave anything on your plate.

We hurry out into the pleasant air again and soon find ourselves beside the long facade of the Great House with its three front doors. The lower one is where we knock. That ding in the door does look as if once in a while some one "made a night of it," but really it was made by years of tapping of Mr. Henrici's horn-handled umbrella. Now half the door swings open and a rosy shiny face appears. "Yes, Miss Rapp is at home, and will you be seated?" It is a long room where we wait her coming. A row of rush-bottom chairs stands stiffly against the outer wall, the beautiful "Colonial" mantel bears four vases of wax fruit, (the work of Miss Gertrude's and Pauline's hands,) and a fine old gilt clock, beneath which is a joy of a Franklin stove. At the side is a lovely little mahogany work-table, then a door over which hangs a fine copy of the "Ecce Homo," with two pianos at right angles, each covered with dark blue silk of home manufacture. Over them hang Benjamin West's replica of his "Christ Healing the Sick," and a lovely "Nativity," said to be by Raphael Mengs. But here is our hostess, and a dear little gentlewoman in the simple dress of the Society, bids us welcome, and we talk of the relations in town and the flowers in the garden, when Miss Gertrude excuses herself, and in a few minutes re-enters with a tray of wine glasses through whose facets you see a ruby liquor. Then she opens a long narrow closet door in the chimney corner and piles ginger cakes on a pink "Adams" plate, and serves you, and you sip the currant wine, (sometimes it is quince-cordial, fit for the gods,) and we discuss the ivory carvings hanging above us and the wonderful old prints on the wall, and Miss Gertrude says, "Perhaps you would like to visit the garden," and with her broad-brimmed hat tied under her chin, leads the way to the loveliest old-fashioned garden.

We walk between clipped box hedges that guard beds where ranks of Mary lilies stand in the midst of sweet scented blossoms, with sentinels of giant scarlet tulips. Then through another grassy path bordered by stiffly pruned standard roses, each a bouquet [sic] in itself, and before us is the pride of Economy—the fish-pond; we cross the still waters, where the gold-fish play in shoals, by a plank to the island where in 1827 Frederick Rapp built a stone summer-house, all set around with green. A winding lattice-enclosed stairway leads to the flat roof where on Sunday afternoon and holidays the band plays.... We pass various sorts of arbors, with many recesses, all vine-clad, ideal spots for lovers' meetings, (That we should think such things here!) with secret doors, that, when you have found them, let you into a cage-like retreat, with benches and tables where the inner man might be refreshed. Beyond is the rough stone wall ivy-mantled and crested with a mass of "hen and chickens" house-leek.... A bed of sweet scented purple and white violets and lilies of the valley lies under the shelter of the wall, and in the Spring the

fragrance is wonderful. But here we turn to the Grotto, built of stones full of fossils and with a door cunningly contrived of bark without sign of hinge or handle, and here is another point of etiquette. You must wonder, audibly, how you get in, but the door does swing open and we stand before the big statue of "Harmony," once intended as a fountain. In her finger tips you can see the holes, out of which water was to have played upon her lyre. On the walls are tablets, recording the founding of Harmony, New Harmony and Economy, and the birth and death of George Rapp. 'Tis an artless place, (in every sense,) and yet in a way impressive. As we have walked along, Miss Rapp and her gardener have been cutting flowers right and left, and as we take leave each of us has a bouquet [sic] given her. Were any like them ever seen out of Economy? A tall pyramid in form, in design more than a little stiff. With a quiet "Auf Wiedersehen," [sic, Auf Wiedersehen] we go out of the side gate beside the tall wooden pump, where another formality is to be observed. We take hold of the iron handle with the big brass ball on the tip, and swing it up and down until the water gushes from the spout, then from the tin cup we drink, germs and all, to the health of Economy....

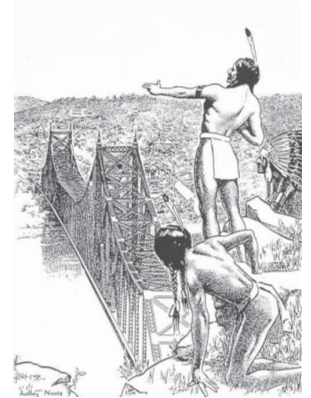
Now the shadows are quite long and at a distance is a sound, faint but momentarily stronger, and shortly the lowing herd, fifty or sixty strong, wind slowly down the street to the barns, and we turn our faces hotel-ward, to a supper of more eggs, honey, fried potatoes, and the best of butter, and bread not long from the bake-shop. A little chat with Melena and Semira on the back porch, and then Daniel comes and glares at us until we are forced to feel sleepy, and before the clock strikes nine, (no one sits up later than that, and the watchman and his mongrel have already made one round). The open windows have driven away all stuffiness, and in the exquisite freshness and fragrance of the air that blows from the river we fall asleep, to be awakened by Daniel thumping along the hall to read the thermometer, even tho our watches only mark five. 'Tis no use trying to sleep, (although it is Sunday,) hundreds of roosters are crowing, swallows are darting and twittering past our windows, and at an early hour we breakfast, take a walk to the Blaine house and then go to church with Melena and Semira.

In the vestibule we find scrupulously clean benches on which an aged sister may rest from the fatigue of half a square, nod gravely and pass to the big auditorium beyond, its ceiling painted in Heaven's own blue. Dare we look around, you would see a balcony over the door we entered. That is where in bygone [sic] days the band played on Easter or "Pfingst" [Pentecost]. A gentle rustle and Miss Gertrude slips in, opens the door in the white paneling of the organ platform, and sits before one organ, Mr. Henrici and Mr. Lentz—splendid Jonathan, who looks as if he had been a soldier—stride in, Mr. Henrici slams his door and takes a seat at another organ, and in a moment you are carried to the earthly Fatherland on the wings of an old choral, whose many verses, as you follow them in the time-yellowed hymn-book, make you think of the Fatherland above. Rather defiantly Mr. Henrici reads from the Holy Bible, and although you may listen to part of his practical sermon, interspersed with remarks on the conduct of some girl who dared to fan herself with her handkerchief, or some equally obnoxious action, you watch the trees swaying beyond the curtained windows and hear the "murmuring of innumerable bees" without, and think how easy it would be to "be good" in this place of peace....

Sewickley Valley Historical Society
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Julie Buscher; Patricia L. Bos; Travis Breaux & Jennifer Cowley;
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all of Sewickley

SVHS Nominating Committee

The following have been named to the Nominating Committee for 2013-2014. The offices to be filled are President, Vice-President, and three Directors. You are encouraged to contact any member of the Committee with your ideas as to who will best fill these positions. The slate will be announced in March.

Maleet Gordon, Chair	412-741-4731
Brewster Cockrell	412-741-5342
Wayne Murphy	412-741-1068
Agnes Pangburn	412-741-5337
Dan Telep	412-741-2634

Signals is designed and edited by Susan C. Holton. Visit our website, www.sewickleyhistory.org — e-mail us at sewickleyhistory@verizon.net — or call us at 412-741-5315. We're open 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, or by appointment.
