

Sewickley Valley Historical Society *Signals*

XL, Number 7

May 2013

Wednesday, May 15, 2013

6:30 p.m. — Old Sewickley Post Office

Celebration of Sewickley Valley Historical Society's 40th Anniversary



Formative meeting of Sewickley Valley Historical Society at the Sewickley Public Library, February 22, 1973.

Front row: Mrs. Alexander Hays III, Frederick Way, Jr., Mrs. Harton S. Semple, Edward J. Wright, Mrs. Hugh W. Nevin, Mrs. D. Leet Shields, Bruce Myers; Back row: Mrs. William M. Moore, Mrs. Frank Wasco, Mrs. Ellis A. Blockson

Join us for wine and hors d'oeuvres
honoring past Presidents of the Historical Society

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Annual Meeting & election of Officers & Directors for 2013/14,
plus a special 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.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Minutes of the 1st Formative Meeting
 Thurs., Feb. 22, 1973 – 1:00 P.M.
 Sewickley Public Library – Meeting Room

At the invitation of Mrs. Betty G. Y. Shields, Editor of the SEWICKLEY HERALD (local weekly publication since 1903), eleven (11) local residents (including Mrs. Shields) met in the Meeting Room of Sewickley Public Library for the express purpose of founding and organizing a historical society, the aim of which is to collect, preserve, document, and record all materials available pertaining to local history. Those attending this first meeting were:

Mrs. D. Leet Shields, Edgeworth (acting as Chairperson)
 Edward J. Wright, Leetsdale
 Mrs. William L. Moore, Sewickley
 Mrs. Frank Wasco, Jr., Leetsdale
 Mrs. Alexander Hays III, Sewickley
 Captain Frederick Way, Jr., Sewickley
 Mrs. Hugh W. Nevin, Sewickley
 Mrs. Ellis A. Blockson, Sewickley
 Mrs. William P. Glancy, Glen Osborne
 Bruce Wayne Myers, Sewickley
 Mrs. Harton S. Semple, Sewickley (who stayed briefly)

Doris Evans made an appearance to take two photographs of the group, with Mrs. Glancy declining inclusion.

Mrs. Shields began the informal meeting by expressing appreciation for the record turnout and thanked everyone for the interest shown. She spoke on the need for a historical society, and suggested areas to consider, such as; documenting recollections of the “good old days” from senior citizens of the Valley, compilations of records of old cemeteries and burials, documenting collections of various kinds (such as old bottles), and exploring the possibility of locating local Indian burial mounds, and surmised there may be one or two on her own land in Edgeworth...which brought up the question of how Mound Street in Fair Oaks got its name. Those present didn’t know.

Mrs. Shields went on and mentioned other people who had reacted favorably to the formation of a historical society, but could not attend this first meeting. Mrs. Shields also mentioned that Mrs. Carole S. Ott had promised to attend future meetings to take shorthand notes for the minutes and hoped that this would work out. Bruce Myers agreed to take notes during the first meeting. (Bruce is a student at Sewickley Academy.)

In introducing those present, Mrs. Shields touched briefly on each one’s area of interest, hers being general, but Indian mounds the most intriguing. Mr. Wright, retired photographer with a priceless collection of old photographs of local people and local scenes, is interested in anecdotes and Leetsdale history. Mrs. Wasco’s interest concerns restoration of old houses and Valley history in general. Captain Way, author and riverboat pilot, is a natural-born historian. Sewickley Negro history is already being researched and recorded by Mrs. Blockson, who is also dedicated to Sewickley history in general. Mrs. Moore’s interest is genealogy, Mrs. Glancy,

Mrs. Hays, Mrs. Nevin, and Mrs. Semple also being interested in Valley history and the people. Bruce Myers, the youngest person attending, is a historian.

Mrs. Shields commented on the relevance of this initial meeting falling on the traditional George Washington’s Birthday and hoped this to be a good omen. Appreciation was expressed for the use of the Meeting Room in this new addition (in use since Nov. 1972) of the Sewickley Library, but Mrs. Shields lamented the absence of a flag, feeling it appropriate for a historical group to open meetings with a salute to the flag. (Mrs. Ben Fondi, Librarian, later made it known that the Library owns only an outdoor flag, not one suitable for indoor use.)

Mrs. Shields concluded her opening comments, suggestions, and queries with a short commentary on George Washington, the man, not the President, and his common, sensitive vanity concerning the loss of his teeth and the obvious discomfort of crude artificial ones. (Mrs. Shields owned up to her own sensitivity about wearing glasses.)

Various comments were interjected throughout as Mrs. Shields conducted the meeting, but, in the main, Mrs. Shields had the floor, until she invited an open discussion concerning objectives and future procedure. Mrs. Moore said she had read a recent newspaper article about the 9 garden clubs in Sewickley, no mention being made of the lack of a historical society. Mrs. Moore thought that one was long overdue, and she further expressed the feeling that it is an obligation to the future to conserve and record what is known and learned of the past. Mr. Wright expressed his impatience about getting to work immediately and said he would try to check out the naming of Mound Street in Fair Oaks. Mrs. Hays passed around several old issues of an early newspaper endeavor which had been retrieved from a box of discarded odds and ends. Mrs. Moore passed around a clear glass paperweight-penholder that one of her brothers had found in a junk store in Ocean Park, California, at least 15 years ago. The object was patented Jan. 20, 1900, by James Adair of Sewickley. (Mr. Adair died July 6, 1924, at the age of 85.) This pointed up the need to make people aware of the historical value of old possessions before discarding them as trash, along with the need for a place to house historical materials as they are accumulated. Mrs. Shields said she had a lead on possible housing but would leave that for later disclosure.

Some familiar names in Sewickley history cropped up in the conversations; such as Gen. Alexander Hays, Ethelbert Nevin, Arthur Nevin, and John Hay (for whom Haysville was named). Comments were forthcoming about early glass factories in the area, such as Bakewell.

Mrs. Shields said she was fairly certain Mrs. Charles B. Roberts would attend a future meeting to give a talk on her hobby of collecting old bottles from local digs.

It was unanimously decided to definitely pursue the founding of a local historical society, with procedures pertaining to such a society left for subsequent meetings. The decision was made to designate Thurs., March 22, 1973, at 1:00, as the next meeting date, to be held again in the Library. Mrs. Shields urged those present to make an effort to bring along interested friends.

At this point, Mrs. Ben Fondi, the Librarian, came in and Mrs. Shields made the introductions. Mrs. Fondi said she didn't see too many familiar faces in the group and chided same, with a smile, for not availing themselves of the library's vast store of knowledge. Mrs. Fondi then proceeded to explain what the library had to offer and how materials were catalogued. She commented on the extensive collection of reference books in the History Room, and what good fortune it is that it contains the Alexander C. Robinson Collection, which is implemented with a catalog of its contents. She then distributed copies of the catalog to illustrate her point.

Mrs. Fondi also displayed a drawer from a card-file cabinet and said each such drawer holds 1000 cards. Several particular drawers of the card-files contain alphabetically filed card compilations on local history, all typewritten from memory and from research by some benevolent soul, unknown, who had donated the whole thing to the library. The file also indexes various articles to be found in the bound volumes of the SEWICKLEY HERALD in the History Room (which date from Sept. 19, 1903, to the present). (None of the bound volumes of the HERALD are otherwise indexed.) Mrs. Fondi said the card compilation has proved invaluable, especially to students.

Mrs. Fondi was surprised at that point on being enlightened to the fact that Captain Fred Way, Jr., had donated the file to the library.

What has happened in the 40 years since those eleven history-minded citizens met on Washington's Birthday in 1973 to form a historical society?

By the second formative meeting on March 22, 1973, the group had its flag, complete with a brass eagle standard, donated to the Library by the Sewickley Board of Trade at the request of Mr. Herman Muko, the Board's President. Unfortunately, by the sixth meeting of the Society, the flag was lost—presumably stolen by a Library patron. Recollections of the “good old days” were documented in a collection of oral history tapes, which we plan to digitize. Sewickley Valley Historical Society has been housed in the Old Sewickley Post Office since its conversion to a cultural center in 1988. The SVHS collection has grown over the years to fill the Postmaster's Office and the area of the old post boxes as well as a room near the kitchen, and we lease a climate-controlled off-site storage facility. The Sewickley Public Library now has the entire *Sewickley Herald* on microfilm, and SVHS has a complete run of the newspaper in our storage room in the Old Post Office. We also have a copy of Captain Way's card file, donated to us by his daughter and son-in-law. Dorothy Moore, a founding member and first Secretary of the Society, became SVHS Archivist. Her extensive, cross-referenced obituary files, acquired at her death in 2010, are housed in a card catalog and are an invaluable tool for genealogical research. B. G. Shields served twice as President of

The Captain, at various times, had filled in as temporary editor of the HERALD, and he started the file as a personal source of reference should the job become full-time. Mrs. Fondi expressed appreciation for his outstanding contribution.

Mrs. Fondi then went on to say there is a very definite need for a permanent and safe record of the library's treasure of irreplaceable reference materials, especially those in the History Room. She suggested micro-filming, not for use as such, but as insurance against possible loss by fire or theft. She also commented on materials of historical value in the library that are not properly contained or stored. As an example, she held up some loose, unbound copies of such materials, which were in just an ordinary plastic bag. Mrs. Fondi has plans for bettering the arrangement of the history collection, such plans already being underway. She expressed satisfaction that concerned community interest has been aroused in preserving local history.

Mrs. Fondi was thanked by all for her informative talk and she lingered to answer a few questions.

The meeting was adjourned about 2:30 P.M.

Bruce Wayne Myers did not attend the 2nd meeting, and thus with no evidence of the minutes of the 1st Formative Meeting in the offing, at the behest of Mrs. Shields and Mrs. Blockson, Mrs. Dorothy M. Moore wrote the afore-read minutes from memory, no secretary having been, as yet, elected.

dorothy m. moore

Dorothy M. Moore

SVHS and as Executive Director of the Historical Society until her retirement in 2005.

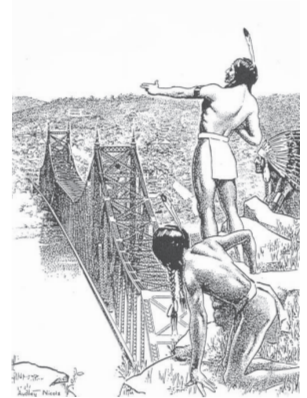
Today, we answer hundreds of queries about local history, in person and by telephone and email, from individuals all over the United States. We catalog and maintain a computer database of a growing archival collection. Our periodical newsletter, *Signals*, has been published since 1979, and issues from the past several years are available for download on our website. We offer a free lecture series on local, regional and national history and have sponsored seminars on genealogy, the renovation of old houses, railroad history and historic preservation. Publications we have produced or encouraged include original books, reprints of historic texts, note cards, postcards, a map, a poster and a recording of piano music. We have sponsored several major exhibitions, both alone and in collaboration with Sweetwater Center for the Arts. We have been instrumental in the preservation of historic objects such as finials from the 1911 Sewickley Bridge and railings from the Sewickley Elementary School, and have contributed to the restoration of the Old Sewickley Post Office, the new statue of “Fame” and the memorial to the Tuskegee Airmen in Sewickley Cemetery.

We trust that the founders would agree that Sewickley Valley Historical Society's mission is being fulfilled.

Sewickley Valley Historical Society
200 Broad Street
Sewickley, PA 15143

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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

In Memoriam

Leon Thurston Thomson