

Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

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Wednesday, March 25, 2015
7:30 p.m.

Old Sewickley Post Office

Custer's Last Stand

A PowerPoint Presentation by
Rob Dunbar

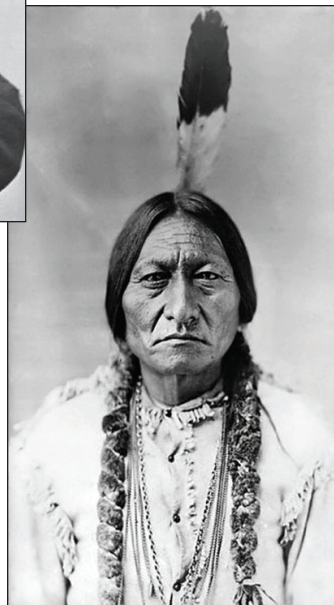
In the spring of 1876, large groups of Sioux and Northern Cheyenne began to leave their reservations and join other non-reservation Indians, thus creating a threat to settlers in the Northern Plains. Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer's 7th U. S. Cavalry was one of three columns that were sent out to drive the Indians back onto their reservations.

On June 25, 1876, after forty days in the saddle, Custer located what was

perhaps the largest concentration of Indians ever assembled in North America near the Little Big Horn River in eastern Montana Territory. He divided his command into three battalions, and in a futile attempt to entrap the Indians, Custer's battalion was soundly defeated by an overwhelming Indian force inspired by the visions of Sitting Bull. The Battle of the Little Big Horn would claim the lives of 268 men of the 7th Cavalry, and an additional 62 would be wounded. Along with Custer, on the bluffs above the Little Big Horn, were the bodies of his brothers Tom and Boston, his nephew Autie Reed and his brother-in-law, Captain Thomas Calhoun.



After 138 years, the causes of the defeat and the actions and personality of George Custer still evoke controversy. Did Custer disobey orders? Was he betrayed by incompetent subordinates? Were the Indians better armed than the cavalry? Was defeat caused by Custer's refusal to take a section of Gatling guns to the battle? Was Custer's "Last Stand" really the Indians' "Last Stand"? Our speaker, Rob Dunbar, will attempt to clarify the many questions about the Battle of the Little Big Horn.



The events of Custer's Last Stand and the life of George Armstrong Custer have fascinated Rob Dunbar for over fifty years. He is an active member of the Western Pennsylvania Civil War Roundtable, The Little Big Horn Associates and the Custer Battlefield Historical & Museum Association. Rob holds a degree in history from the Pennsylvania State University and is employed by RBC Wealth Management. He lives in Franklin Park with his wife, Denise, and his sons, Robby and Eric.

Refreshments will be served following the presentation.

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

The Beaver Road: From Indian Trail to Trans-Continental Highway

From time immemorial, Native Americans traveling from the forks of the Ohio River westward followed a well worn path on the north side of the river that hugged the base of the hills above the flood plain. Today this path is the Beaver Road in the Sewickley Valley.

In November 1753, Colonel George Washington and companions, after swimming their horses across the river from where Fort Pitt and Pittsburgh would be located, followed this path to Logstown (near present day Ambridge, Pennsylvania) on their way to meet with French officials at Fort Le Boeuf (today Franklin, Pennsylvania), to emphasize the fact that the English resented the presence of French traders in Western Pennsylvania.

In the fall of 1764, another prominent traveler along the path was Colonel Henry Bouquet, the commandant of Fort Pitt, who led a punitive expedition against the Indians in the Ohio Country during the conflict known as Pontiac's War, forcing them to sign a treaty of peace and recovering over three hundred white captives. The first night out from Pittsburgh, Bouquet's force probably camped in what is today Glen Osborne, beside the bank of Davis Run.

Fort McIntosh, built by Americans in 1778 during the Revolution where the Beaver River empties into the Ohio River, was supplied from Fort Pitt by river and also via the aforementioned path. In 1792, Daniel Leet, who had done the first surveys in a part of the Sewickley Valley in 1785, laid out the town of Beaver beside the now ruined Fort McIntosh, and the land route became known as the Beaver path. In 1793, General "Mad Anthony" Wayne trained troops for what proved to be the final campaign against the Indians in the Ohio Country at Legionville (today's Baden, Pennsylvania), and although most of his force traveled by barge on the Ohio River, the path to Beaver was widened and improved to accommodate pack trains. Wayne decisively defeated the Indians at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 and, with the signing of a treaty at Greenville, Ohio, in 1795, the Ohio Country (today Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan) was finally open to settlement. A land rush ensued. Soon there was a wagon road to Beaver and the West, which became heavily traveled.

Strings of Conestoga wagons, pulled by six big fine horses with bells on them, could be seen along the road. There were large droves of cattle, horses, sheep, pigs and turkeys. The hogs were the hardest to drive and turkeys the easiest. Men would run alongside of the fowl with a piece of red flannel on a long pole and scare them so they would crowd together and run. When it began to get dark, they couldn't be driven; they would fly up into the trees and roost.

Travelers were accommodated at various establishments in our valley such as the 1815 Half-Way House (today known as Lark Inn, across from the high school in Leetsdale, Pennsylvania). Soon there was a stagecoach every day, one each way, between Pittsburgh and Beaver. The stage stopped at the David Shields house, "Newington", which

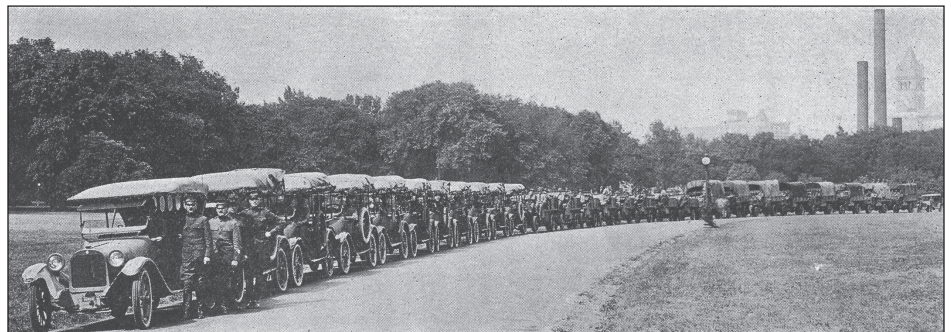
survives today in Edgeworth, from which Mr. Shields conducted the business of the Sewickley Bottom Post Office. The stone bridge on the Beaver Road, where it crosses Little Sewickley Creek, was constructed in 1841 to replace an earlier wooden span that crossed downstream. Today, widened and improved in 1917, it still serves traffic.

The Beaver Road, a major artery to the West, was eventually paved and in time was used by motor vehicles. In fact, it was once part of a trans-continental highway known as the Lincoln Highway.

The Lincoln Highway, obviously honoring President Abraham Lincoln, was conceived in 1913 by Carl Fischer, the man responsible for the Indianapolis Speedway, and Henry Joy, President of the Packard Motor Company, to promote travel on a coast-to-coast motor route from New York City to San Francisco, to be completed in time for the San Francisco Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915. The route of the Lincoln Highway through Pennsylvania roughly followed the course of what was the old Forbes Road (cut during a military expedition in 1758 by General John Forbes) and the future Pennsylvania Turnpike. Today it follows U. S. Route 30. The highway was, and still is in some places, marked with red, white and blue signs with a big "L" in the middle.

Over the years, many changes were made in the Lincoln Highway route as road building and economic interests dictated, but the original 1915 route came through the Sewickley Valley. Known as the "Proclamation Route" west from Pittsburgh, it included Bellvue, Avalon, Ben Avon, Emsworth, Glenfield, Haysville, Sewickley, Fair Oaks and Ambridge, following the old Beaver Road along the north bank of the Ohio River.

On January 12, 1916, the Sewickley Borough Council officially recognized this fact with an ordinance that stated that "Beaver Street, its entire length, from Boundary Street northwestwardly to Academy Avenue, shall hereafter be known as and named 'Lincoln Highway.'" The other Sewickley Valley boroughs, Osborne, Edgeworth and Leetsdale, also adopted the new name.



The U. S. Army Transport that came through Sewickley on the Lincoln Highway on July 11, 1919. This photo shows it at its start from Washington, D. C., on its trip to San Francisco.

From the *Sewickley Herald*, July 19, 1919

The usefulness of such a highway was made plain during World War I, as ever more materials were moved by road. Just eight months after the armistice in 1919, a military convoy traveled on the Lincoln Highway from Washington, D. C., to San Francisco,

California, in 62 days, a distance of 3310 miles. There were 72 vehicles, both trucks and automobiles, 260 men and 35 officers, statisticians and observers, all led by Lincoln Highway Field Secretary H. C. Osterman in a white Packard touring car. All the equipment completed the trip except for one truck that was wrecked in the Allegheny Mountains. A last minute addition to the company was a Tank Corps observer, Lt. Col. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who as President in 1956 signed into law the Interstate Highway Act.

This convoy stopped in Sewickley overnight on July 11, 1919, having made arrangements with Judge William Addison Way for the use of Way Field (later Way Park) in Edgeworth for a camp site. The vehicles were parked along Beaver Road for the night,

and the block from the foot of "Sand Hill" to Quaker Road was closed to traffic. A great many Sewickley and Edgeworth people visited the camp during the early evening. The ladies of the Red Cross arranged an informal dance at the Edgeworth Club, which in those days was located at Academy and Centennial Avenues in Sewickley, and an open air moving picture show was provided. The convoy hurried onward the next morning.

The Lincoln Highway was moved to U. S. Route 30 in 1927, but our venerable Beaver Road served for a time as part of the first continuous, connecting, improved highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

The unprecedented number of new members, friends, sponsors, patrons and benefactors listed below is due in large part to a recent campaign of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society's Membership Committee, chaired by Board member Fran Merryman. Those who worked on the campaign include Jay Brooks, Charlotte Bober, Connor Cogswell, Carole Ford, Joan and Jim Darby, Doug Florey, David Genter, Agnes Pangburn, Mary Anne Riley, Brenda Roth, Deb Thornton and Mike Tomama. Thank you to all!

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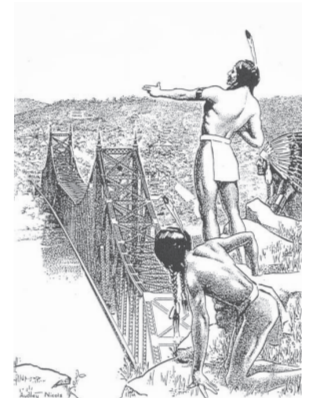
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Fran Merryman, in honor of the SVHS Membership Committee

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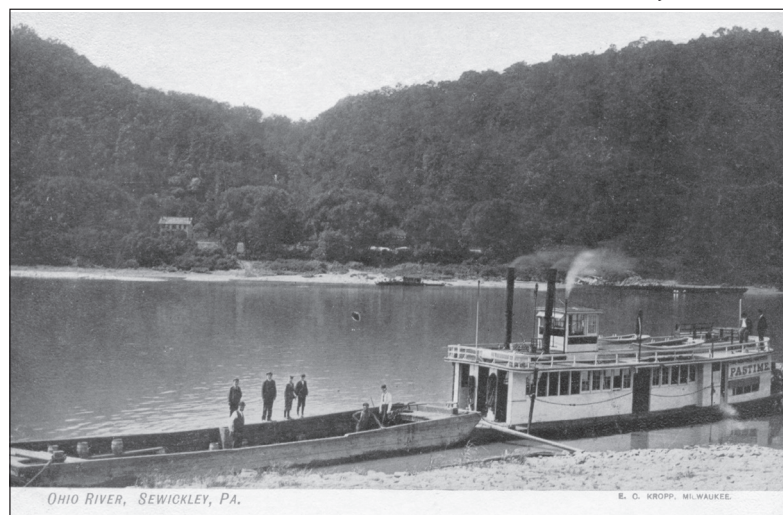
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This is the first in a series of images from the Historical Society's vast collection of photographs documenting Sewickley's rich historical past that we plan to publish regularly in Signals. We hope that the photos will spark your curiosity and encourage you to visit our office to see what else we have to offer. Mike Tomana, President

Ohio River, Sewickley, Pa.



Prior to the relocation of the railroad and the construction of permanent locks and dams on the Ohio River in the 1920s, Sewickley had a vibrant riverfront. This pre-1910 postcard view shows the steamer *Pastime*, which traveled between Shoustown and Aliquippa, with stops at Old Economy, Leetsdale and Sewickley. Directly across the river can be seen Stoops' Ferry, one of the ferries that connected Sewickley with the south side of the river before the construction of the Sewickley-Coraopolis Bridge in 1911. The site of Stoops' Ferry is now occupied by a motorcycle shop and a carwash.