

Sewickley Valley Historical Society

Signals

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September 2017

Wednesday, September 20, 2017
7:30 p.m.
Old Sewickley Post Office

It's About Time: The Establishment of Five Standard Time Zones in the United States

A PowerPoint Presentation by Ken Kobus

Ken Kobus has addressed the Sewickley Valley Historical Society before, most recently last November, on the subject his book *City of Steel*, which is about how Pittsburgh became the world's steelmaking capital. Ken is a third generation steel worker, born in the Southside of Pittsburgh, growing up near the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation–Pittsburgh Works, where both his father and grandfather worked. Beginning as a laborer, Ken worked his way through every aspect of the steel industry, eventually

putting himself through night school and obtaining a degree in engineering from the University of Pittsburgh. This allowed him to move into managerial positions before finally retiring as process safety manager for U. S. Steel–Mon Valley Works, Clairton Plant. Throughout his career he has amassed hundreds of photos and artifacts related to the Pittsburgh area's industrial history, which he has donated to the University of Pittsburgh and the Rivers of Steel Heritage Museum in Homestead, PA.

Ken's lecture this month discusses how the patchwork of times kept across the country, which made coordinating rail schedules next to impossible, was standardized, as well as the role that Pittsburgh and the Pennsylvania Railroad played in the simplification.

Did you know that, in the late nineteenth century, the Pennsylvania Railroad established its own time zones, with Pittsburgh's Union Station as the boundary between East and West. Therefore, Sewickley would have been on Central, not Eastern, time! It wasn't until 1918 that the federal government officially adopted the railroad time zones in use today.



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.

Discovering Gold

Bill Carson was luckier than most boys who dream of finding buried treasure. He discovered his practically in his own backyard.

Bill was delivering papers in the Cochran Street area of Sewickley back in the 1950s, when an object under the foundation of an old house that was being torn down caught his eye. He fished out the mud-encrusted metal piece and carried it to a concealed spot.

After finishing his route, he retrieved it and went to the man in charge of excavation, and asked if he could have it. "Take it," he was told, "it's just a piece of junk."

If the construction boss were alive today, he would have to change his tune, because it appears Bill Carson is the owner of an antique sundial of museum quality. On the basis of his research, Bill believes the brass dial was produced by an early Pittsburgh foundry.

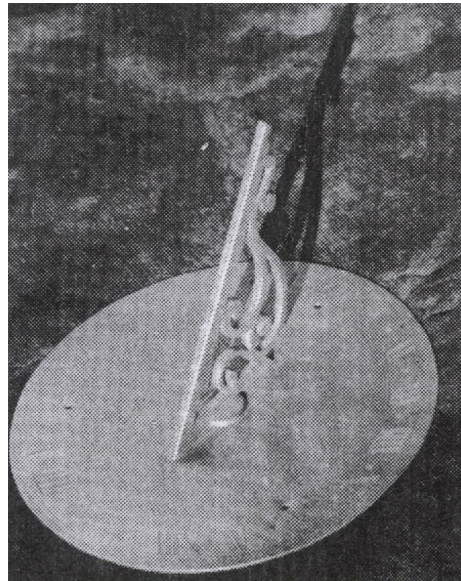
Furthermore, the latitudinal calculations – 40 degrees, 30 Minutes North – indicate that the piece was made for an early Sewickley garden. That doubles the value for Bill, who is a native of the town.

Bill Carson admits his research was slow. After all, more than four decades have passed since he dug his treasure out of the ground. Most of that time was consumed by the fact that Bill was earning a living as a manager in the chemical industry.

His "hunk of junk" remained on the shelf until about 10 years ago when he took oil and began wiping it down. Beautiful traces of roses began to emerge. Then, lo and behold, between Roman numerals, there was even a verse too faint to read because of the encrustation.

Next, Bill had the piece given a non-destructive cleaning by a professional. The verse became clear: "Hasten, Traveler," it read. "The sun shall set. But never Thou again." [A similar

inscription appears in James G. Commin's *West-Country Stories and Sketches Biographical and Historical*, 1895. In a chapter entitled "A Sermon in Stone: West-Country Sundials," Commin describes the inscription on a 1698 sundial with three faces, set on a pillar: "LIFE STEALS AWAY, O MAN. THIS HOUR IS LENT THEE. PATIENTLY WORK THE WORK OF HIM THAT SENT THEE. HASTE TRAVELLER, THE SUN IS SINKING NOW. HE SHALL RETURN AGAIN, BUT NEVER THOU."]



Fascinated now, and consumed with curiosity, Bill began making the rounds of places he thought might be able to identify his piece. These included John Brashear Institute, Allegheny Observatory, The Carnegie and Pittsburgh universities.

"Is this just a production piece?" he wanted to know.

"No, it's hand-engraved. It's an original," an expert at The Carnegie told him, but no one could advise where or when the sundial was made.

Last November, after he mailed photos to The Time Museum in Rockford, Ill., he was advised that the measurement of the gnomon angle of the dial is the same as Sewickley. "The engraving is

particularly fine, especially the band of roses inside the numerals." John Shallcross, conservator of The Time Museum, placed the dial ca. 1780-1800. As to origin, he could not say. Perhaps, American; perhaps, it could be English.

Taking another look at his piece, Bill noticed something he hadn't observed before. On the upright of the gnomon were the initials S and D. Near the base of the gnomon was a small rectangle with tiny letters, w and p.

These clues led him to more research on whether or not the piece could have been produced in Pittsburgh so early in its history. He struck paydirt again when he came upon a reprint of the "First Directory of Pittsburgh 1815." There his quest ended.

Listed as a clock and watchmaker, east side of Market, between Diamond & Fifth: one Samuel Davis. The S and D! Further proof that his sundial could have been produced in the city that early was found on page 142, advertised under the title Butt Hinges. "William Price, at his Foundry at the Round house, makes Crucibles to cast all kinds of iron, brass, &c. of every dimension. All kinds of small castings in brass or iron, softened, fit for turning or filing, for all kinds of machinery. He also casts butt hinges."

Remember Shakespeare's observation that but for a nail the shoe was lost, and consequently, the horse and battle. But for that advertisement for butt hinges, Bill Carson would have spent the rest of his life wondering about his treasure.

As for William Price and Samuel Davis, advertising may have secured their immortality.

This article by B. G. Shields first appeared in the March 1992 edition of Signals. Bill Carson is a member of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society.

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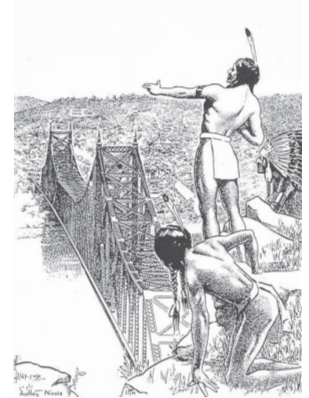
In Memoriam

Frank V. Cahouet, Dr. James G. Pitcavage, Betty G. Y. Shields, Peter K. Sour, Phyllis Thomas, Karl J. Urda

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The Historical Society has recently uploaded 300 postcard images to an album in Forever.com. The illustrations in Sewickley Valley Historical Society's 2006 book, *Sewickley*, were chosen from among these postcards. To view the album, go to:

www.forever.com/app/albums/dbb73d7d-caa3-4588-9331-6f6fab28f1d4

Clicking on the first image will enable you to view the pictures in the album individually, or you can choose to view them as a slide show. Enjoy!

From the *Western Argus*, February 7, 1834:

TO BLACKSMITHS.

To RENT, and possession given on the first of April next, a good **SMITH SHOP**, with dwelling house, pasture, &c. situate on the great road, about half way between Pittsburgh and Beaver; will suit industrious, steady man, with a well disposed family—none other need apply, as recommendations to that effect will be required from the applicant. For further information, apply to the subscriber, living near the premises, or by letter, addressed to Sewickley Bottom Post Office.

DAVID SHIELDS.

Jan. 28, 1834.