

Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

XLV, Number 5

April 2018

Wednesday, April 18, 2018

*Join us at the Old Sewickley Post Office at 6:30 p.m.
for refreshments, provided by the Walker Family.*

7:30 p.m.

The Walker Family in the Sewickley Valley

*A PowerPoint Presentation by
Harton S. Semple, Jr.*



“Muottas”, high on the hill above Leetsdale and Edgeworth, was designed in 1903 by architects Alden & Harlow for Hay Walker’s son William. It has been in the news lately. The house was moved by a new owner several hundred yards from its original site to make way for a house that

In the early 1830s, two Walker brothers, William (1806-1883) and Hay (1815-1884), emigrated from Scotland to settle in Pittsburgh. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many members of their families came to live in the Sewickley Valley, joining a general migration from Allegheny City to this downriver suburb. Five of the eight children of Hay and Jeanette Charters Walker came here: John Walker, Samuel Charters Walker, William Walker, Elizabeth Walker Pontefract and Hay Walker, Jr. Margaret Hepburn Walker, daughter of Hay Walker’s brother, William, married David Thompson (D. T.) Watson and lived in the Sewickley Valley. The Walkers left the Sewickley Valley a better place than they found it.

was never constructed, and the land was subsequently purchased by the Quaker Valley School District for a new High School. The entire property will likely be very different in the future. Nevertheless, the entire Walker family is integral to the history of the Sewickley Valley and, because of its loyalty to the community and its many benefactions, will not be forgotten.

Harton S. Semple, Jr., President of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society, will share a short history of the Walker family and their businesses, describe the many houses of the Walkers in the Valley and endeavor to explain their lasting legacy.

The Railroad in Edgeworth

The following is from a manuscript written by Capt. Frederick Way, Jr. (1901-1992), in which he presented "in capsule form the genesis of [Edgeworth]."

The Ohio & Pennsylvania Rail Road Co. commenced operations on a single track between Pittsburgh and New Brighton on July 4, 1851. This improvement was viewed with alarm in Edgeworth, where the opinion was that railroads were cow-killers. David Shields and Paul Way, to protect their cattle, demanded and procured an agreement, in which fences were built on both sides of the track. The railroad paid the bill. The original stations did not include Quaker Valley, Edgeworth or Shields; the first stop west of Sewickley in 1851 was Shousetown Lane (later Leetsdale). Immediately after the Civil War, in 1865, the railroad was double-tracked between Pittsburgh and Rochester. The original iron rails, manufactured at Brady's Bend on the Allegheny River, were taken up in 1867 and replaced with steel. In 1900 the four-track line was laid. Until June 24, 1929, the right-of-way through Edgeworth followed the present course of the Ohio River Boulevard, and on that date the trains were switched to the new roadbed, which still exists.

Quaker Valley station was located along the present day boulevard somewhat above the intersection of Hazel Lane. Edgeworth station was at the foot of Edgeworth Lane (for many years called Seminary Lane) and Shields station was at the foot of Church Lane. When the tracks were removed riverward, Quaker Valley was eliminated and Edgeworth changed to the foot of Quaker Lane. The contracting operation of moving the tracks commenced in 1916, and was 13 years in progress before completion.

Prior to the railroad, the traffic to and from Edgeworth was no better and no worse than many Ohio River towns. Stagecoaches drawn by four horses ran on schedule between Pittsburgh and Cleveland along the Beaver Road. There still are families in the area who claim ancestors who drove these coaches. Lumber, shingles, window frames, doors, salt and such necessities were available at the river. Storeboats, dish boats, trading scows and Allegheny rafts tied to sycamores at the foot of Hazel Lane and also at the foot of Seminary Lane and did business. Abishai Way's house was built from such Allegheny lumber.

But the usual mode of travel in early times was by horseback. There is record that David Shields on more than one occasion went by such four-footed locomotion to Philadelphia and back. Stagecoach travel was somewhat risky during the spring thaw, and occasionally a coach spilled its occupants. The Rev. Mr. Kerr was so precipitated in 1835, near the Edgeworth Borough building, and spent five weeks with the Shields family while mending.

But the railroad changed all that. The fashion was to build an elaborately landscaped home along the tracks. Such homes took root from Shields to Academy Avenue. The unvarying



Because of numerous fatal accidents at the railroad crossings, Valley residents "agitated the issue" until the railroad tracks were removed from the present location of the Ohio River Boulevard to the site they now occupy. The work took many years, but was finally completed in the 1929. When the work began, however, it brought unnecessary dismay to the residents. This photograph ran as a cover for the October 6, 1923, *Herald*, under the caption, A MENACE TO OUR VALLEY? "The filling of the low ground just west of Shields Station by Duquesne Slag Products Co. is causing anxiety among Sewickley residents who fear the erection of a furnace or factory which might mean a lasting cloud of dust or smoke, as the property is private ground. The filling, done by means of the conveyor and loading hopper shown and four dump wagons, is progressing rapidly." This photo is in the SVHS Bicentennial Collection.

recipe was a front yard facing the railroad filled with black cinders too deep for grass to survive in, a cinder path paralleling the rails, bituminous coal smoke wafting in doors and windows and an almost continual roar of chugging locomotives, escaping steam and frightful whistling. Most of these big homes were painted white for reasons too abstruse for comprehension. The war against soot, cinders and tarnish was heroic, relentless and expensive. Housewives were forever buying new curtains. Window washing was such a familiar scene that you don't think of those homes without mental inclusion of an opened window—where a maid was seated backwards on the sill, swiping a white cloth.

Edgeworth had its share of railroad celebrities so located. In Shields were the homes of James D. Layng [1833-1908] and of the fabled

Leonor F. Loree [1858-1940] who once was president of 34 railroads all at the same time.

Charles Watts [1845-1920] lived at the foot of Quaker Road, superintendent of Lines West, P.R.R. He was a Civil War veteran and had been in Phil Sheridan's cavalry. There is a little book in the Sewickley Public Library he wrote called "Bill and Me" recounting his experiences in the war with his buddy William V. Branson. The P.R.R. for years ran a Pullman named WATTS on the Pittsburgh-Cleveland trains. Charles Watts on occasion had the local commuter stopped in front of his house, if the weather was bad.

In the peak of the “railroad era” the normal way to go anywhere was by train. The locals were plentiful, hauled by high-wheeler locomotives with fancy-topped stacks. The coaches were neat, the aisles clean and the upholstery splendid. In summer the windows were thrown open and cinders were accepted—with a shrug when one went down your coat collar—with a wince if in your eye. The brakemen were young and handsome, wearing blue uniforms and gold buttons and white gloves, forever helping the ladies on and off and saying to the men “smoker in the rear” or “smoker up forward.” The conductor stood in the open vestibule while his cargo came aboard, Hamilton watch in hand and like as not a decorative engine on the snap gold

case, ready to pull the cord at leaving time, phhhhht--phhhhht. The engine clouded the sky with smoke, blew off steam with a shattering ear-piercing racket enough to wake the dead, and tolled its brass bell, always impatient to chew up the track ahead of it. Invariably when it started the wheels slid on the tracks causing an awesome uproar of sound and pyrotechnics, whereupon the grave-faced engineer eased the throttle and let her get hold of herself before he tried a second time. Some boys said the engineers did this stunt on purpose to shake down the furnace fires; others claimed this was not so and that the great power of the machinery did it; this writer never did learn which was true.

Opening of the Nine-Foot Channel on the Ohio River, 1929

You might be interested in this YouTube video. Go to *YouTube*, then *Canalization 1929*

The occasion was the official opening of the nine-foot channel (“canalization”) project on the Ohio River, a series of locks and dams allowing for reliable year-round river traffic. One of the boats you’ll see is Capt. Frederick Way Jr.’s “Betsy Ann,” a steamboat bought for him by his father in 1925. Below is a description of the event as described by Way in his book *The Log of the Betsy Ann*. The last minutes of the video show President Herbert Hoover dedicating a monument in Cincinnati on October 22nd and arriving in Louisville on the 23rd. He returned to Washington on Black Thursday, October 24th, the beginning of the stock market crash.

The Ohio Valley Improvement Association had arranged a river parade to celebrate the completion of the Ohio River canalization project and October 18, 1929, found the Pittsburgh wharf lined with steamboats—twenty-five of them—all steamed up and ready to cavort around in the Pittsburgh harbor and raise a hullabaloo with their whistles. Ol’ Man River got up that day and cheered. I got a scrub crew together and the Betsy Ann added her contribution to the general uproar.

That was a notable experience in more ways than one. The Betsy Ann, in addition to being one twenty-fifth of a major demonstration, was putting on a celebration of her own. She had raised steam for the first time as a “free lance” packet—the river fellows nicknamed her “Little Orphan Annie” for the reason that she had no regular freight and passenger trade. I was in seventh heaven on another score: I had just passed an examination in the Steamboat Inspector’s Office and had been granted a first-class pilot license on the Ohio River between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati. This was a big achievement, I thought: the task of writing out the examination answers and drawing the required maps of the river had taken all of twelve days’ solid work.

Never before had I stepped up in a pilothouse and taken full charge in that sanctum; now I had elected myself chief pilot on the Betsy Ann—and was to make my initial performance in full view of twenty-four other steamboat crews and thousands and thousands of spectators. More than that, the Betsy was designated to tow an excursion barge, the *Manitou*, which was to have about four hundred persons aboard. The night before the parade day I spent in considerable tossing about in my bed; I had visions of the wind blowing and other sources of pilot trouble.



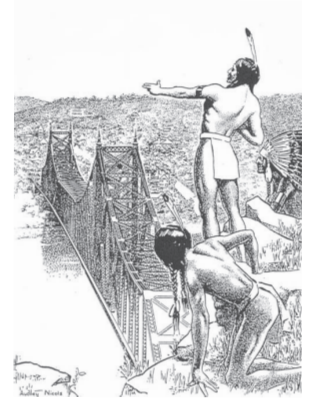
Dean Cornwell’s painting of the Betsy Ann, which appeared on a 34-cent U.S. Postage stamp celebrating American illustrators.

The day proved a wonderful one. October’s bright blue weather prevailed, a warm sun shone on the event and no wind blew. I backed the Betsy out with her charge and opened up the whistle with blast after blast—a contributing din to the salvo of salutes which caused the Monongahela River waterfront to roar as though an immense pipe organ had opened up with all notes at one time. The mellow notes of the Betsy’s steam whistle were lost in the roar of more mighty sirens but I tramped the treadle with a zest just the same; . . . celebrating the Ohio River canalization . . . my initial performance as a pilot—and many another toot for the reason of having such a fine Dad.

Sewickley Valley Historical Society
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Sewickley, PA 15143

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April 2018



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*Thanks to the following, who, since our last newsletter,
have supported Sewickley Valley Historical Society with gifts in addition to basic dues.*

George J. Berry III; Emerson & Emma Duxbury; Ann Yost

New Members

Emerson & Emma Duxbury, Sewickley; Scott Hardy, Sewickley

Special Contributions

Gloria Berry, in memory of B. G. Shields
George H. and Susan D. Craig Fund of The Pittsburgh Foundation
Peggy Standish, in memory of Isaac Shina

The Board of Directors is pleased to announce that John J. Poister, Jr., has been selected as Sewickley Valley Historical Society's new Executive Director. He will begin work in mid-April. More information will follow in the May issue of *Signals*.

We apologize for the cancellation on March 21, 2018, of Louise Sturgess's presentation, *Celebrating Pittsburgh*, because of eight and a half inches of snow, the most on that date since 1924. Please note that whenever Quaker Valley Schools are closed because of snow, the Old Sewickley Post Office building is also closed, and so is Sewickley Valley Historical Society. We will try to re-schedule Ms. Sturgess's program next year.

The vote on the SVHS Bylaws revision, scheduled for the March meeting, will take place at the April meeting.