

# Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

XLVII, Number 2

October 2019

Wednesday, October 16, 2019

7:30 p.m., at the Old Sewickley Post Office

## Longfellow, Alden & Harlow in the Sewickley Valley

A PowerPoint Presentation by Mary Beth Pastorius

In 1994, The University of Chicago Press (in association with Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation) published Tufts Professor Margaret Henderson Floyd's masterpiece, *Architecture after Richardson: Regionalism before Modernism—Longfellow, Alden & Harlow in Boston and Pittsburgh*.

Celebrating the book's twenty-fifth anniversary, Mary Beth Pastorius will discuss the significance of Longfellow, Alden & Harlow's work in Sewickley during the 1890s and early 1900s, sharing photos and experiences from her ten years as Dr. Floyd's research assistant.

The firm's Sewickley work began in the early 1890s along Maple Lane in what is now Edgeworth. Later that decade, their work shifted to opulent "summer cottages" in Sewickley Heights. By 1902, it was concentrated along the Beaver and Boundary Street corridors in Sewickley Borough. Client names were prominent in the era's *Blue Book*, and many, such as Pontefract, Walker, Black, McKnight, McCague, Shields, Jones, Boggs, Singer, Lowrie, Arrott and Adams, are familiar to residents today. Sewickley Valley Historical Society, led by its then executive director B. G. Shields, provided major support to Dr. Floyd's project, including co-sponsorship of an award-winning exhibition at the Old Sewickley Post Office in 1990 that illustrated the architects' work in both Boston and Pittsburgh.



The "Pittsburgh team" celebrates with author Margaret Henderson Floyd at the 1994 book release party. From left: Louise Sturgess, PHLF executive director; Dr. Floyd; Walter C. Kidney, PHLF architectural historian and writer; Mary Beth Pastorius, Sewickley researcher. Photo by William Rydberg

Saturday, October 19, 2019

## Field Trip to Laughlin Memorial Free Library, Ambridge

See page 2 for details

*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.

# Field Trip to Laughlin Memorial Free Library

Saturday, October 19, 2019, 10:30-11:30 a.m.



Tour the beautiful 90-year-old Laughlin Memorial Library, the gift of Mr. & Mrs. Alexander Laughlin of Edgeworth in memory of their son, Alexander Laughlin, Jr. Explore the Italian Renaissance-style building designed by Laughlin Jr.'s close friend, architect Eric Fisher Wood. Hear their story of the founding of Sewickley's American Legion Post #4, one of the first posts in Pennsylvania and the nation. Learn about the Laughlin family's history of living and working in the Valley and Sewickley's connections with Ambridge, both then and now. Peek into the Pennsylvania History Room and Archives, comprising material related to "Mad" Anthony Waynes's Legionville training grounds, Old Economy Village, American Bridge Company and more.

**Meet at the Old Sewickley Post Office at 10:00 a.m. if you wish to carpool.**

**Otherwise, meet at the Laughlin Memorial Free Library, 99 Eleventh Street, Ambridge, at 10:30.**

The tour will be followed by an optional Dutch-treat lunch at Azul Bar-Y-Cantina, 122 Broad Street, Leetsdale.

**RSVP by Friday, October 11, 2019**

**if you plan to attend, if you wish to carpool & if you will be joining us for lunch.**

Call 412-741-5315 or email us at [info@sewickleyhistory.org](mailto:info@sewickleyhistory.org)

## A Note on the Laughlins

Alexander Laughlin, Sr., was born in 1866 in Wheeling, West Virginia. In 1883, he began his career as a clerk at the Laughlin Nail Company of Wheeling, later working at the Junction Iron Company, also in Wheeling. In 1887, he married Mary Bushnell Mead, and they had one son, Alexander Laughlin, Jr. (1889-1926). In that same year, Laughlin came to Pittsburgh, where he engaged in the design and construction of furnaces in iron and steel mills, trading as Alexander Laughlin & Company. His firm designed and built many of the largest steel plants in the United States.

In 1904, Laughlin purchased the Pittsburgh Steel Construction Company in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, and shortly thereafter purchased land in Economy (later Ambridge), where he built a modern structural steel plant. This operation was discontinued in 1909 and sold to the Central Tube Company, which had been organized by Mr. Laughlin. In time, five pipe mills would be constructed in Ambridge. He was also later involved with the Verona Tool Works.

The Laughlins moved to Edgeworth in 1891 and lived where the Sewickley Academy faculty housing is located today in a house called Linganore. Mrs. Laughlin founded the Sewickley Fresh Air Home in 1901 on Big Sewickley Creek Road in Fair Oaks, intended to provide "for needy children from Pittsburgh's

tenement neighborhoods." Later, the home served crippled and convalescent children. The Fresh Air Home continued to offer services into the 1950s. When Mary Mead Laughlin died in 1953, the home was combined with the Child Counseling Center of Sewickley Valley (sponsored by the Child Health Association of Sewickley) to form the Laughlin Children's Center, which opened in 1956.

The Laughlins' son, Alexander Laughlin, Jr., died June 12, 1926, while under an anaesthetic for tooth extraction. He was 38 years old. He was a major in the U. S. Army, having served in the 83rd Division on the staff of Major General E. S. Glenn. At the time of his death, he was president of Alexander Laughlin & Company and the Central Tube Company and a director of the Verona Tool Works and the Monongahela National Bank of Pittsburgh. He was married in 1924 to Margaret Mellon Laughlin, and they had one son, Alexander Laughlin III. The Laughlin Memorial Free Library in Ambridge was built by his parents in his memory and was opened July 6, 1929. Its building and dedication are well documented in the *Sewickley Herald*.

*Adapted from an article in the October 2014 issue of Signals entitled "Who were the Laughlins." The article can be read in its entirety on our website, [www.sewickleyhistory.org](http://www.sewickleyhistory.org).*

Last month, Sewickley Valley Historical Society showed, for the first time since 1940, the film documenting the Centennial of the Naming of the Town, "Sewickleyville." In researching Alexander Laughlin, Jr., for this month's issue of Signals, we came across the two following articles in the April 20, 1918, issue of the Sewickley Herald. It seems that movies have always been popular in the Valley!

## A BIG WAR-SCHOOL

*"Re-Making of a Nation" Is Practically a Visit to Camp Sherman*

Did you ever go through a soldier factory? A modern soldier factory, where underdeveloped city youth shuffle through its entrances one day and emerge in an amazingly short time erect, uniformed men, with a cocky step and confident air?

You would enjoy such an experience if you had two or three weeks to yourself, a competent guide and an open sesame to Ohio's immense war-camp at Chillicothe. But all that you would see and learn on such an excursion has been reduced to a film in a motion picture made under the auspices of General Glenn, camp commander. It is called "The Re-Making of a Nation," and reveals every phase of our newest industry, soldier making.

This film which has been drawing crowded houses for two or three weeks at the Pitt Theatre in Pittsburgh was screened for Sewickley by the Sewickley Valley Guard, and will be shown at the Sewickley Theatre on next Wednesday and Thursday afternoon and evening, and at St. Matthew's [sic] A.M.E. Zion Church on Friday evening. President Wilson and the war department at Washington have urged that every American see this film if possible.

It is a six reel journey through a war school. It opens with the arrival of a long string of drafted youths from various parts of the state. The spectator is then taken along with the embryonic soldiers, through the medical examiner's office, into the sleeping quarters, where the new uniforms are put on, thence to the recreation field, where sports of all sorts are in progress, and finally into the more serious features of military development.

Road building, trench building, bayonet drill, bombing, charges against the enemies with fixed bayonets, target practice—in fact every phase of battle preparation through which the students are put is shown in vivid and convincing close-up views. It will be most assuring to mothers and fathers and others who are



CAPTAIN ALEXANDER LAUGHLIN  
Aid to Major General Edwin F. Glenn,  
Camp Sherman's Commander, Who  
Had "The Re-making of a  
Nation" Filmed

intimately concerned with the boys' welfare, we venture, to see with their own eyes the infinite pains the Government has taken to make their lot comfortable and practicable. "The department of eats" is regulated on the same painstaking basis that marks the conduct of a city's finest hostelry. You are impressed by the abundance of food and the generous rations; you catch yourself selfishly wishing you were down there, when you see huge cuts of choice beef reduced to appetizing steaks.

A lot of men who know nothing at all about any kind of trade are going to come away from this camp skilled workers of engineering, carpentry, road building, etc. Of course, we realized all this was going on in the cantonments; the papers have been telling us about it for months, some of us have been down and seen bits of the life

for ourselves; but after all it takes the motion picture camera to give one a true appreciation of the immensity of the affair.

And we'll say this much for the film; it has been done with a professional finish. The photography is excellent. Whoever directed it had one eye for beauty and another for spectacular drama. The view showing the entire ensemble of 40,000 men marching in review before General Glenn is an inspiring thing. The close of the picture showing a lone soldier doing sentry duty near the crest of a hill with the vast camp in the background, wrapped in sleep and moonlight, is a touch that would have done credit to some of the screen's foremost directors.

Make an effort to see this picture. It is distinctly worthwhile, not only as an illuminative war document, but as an interesting film entertainment. The picture is to be shown in the Sewickley Theatre under the auspices of the Sewickley Valley Guard. The proceeds are to go the 83rd Division War Relief Fund and the Sewickley Y.M.C.A.

## "Skeins of Destiny"

It was not exactly "Destiny's Night Out," but the "Skeins of Destiny" held the boards at the Edgeworth Club in a charming fashion last Thursday evening in the double bill given by the Sewickley Valley Hospital Cot Club. The affair opened with the rendition of some patriotic airs and then the familiar scenes of "Skeins of Destiny" unrolled to view. Like good wine, this fetching home playlet improves with age, and those present who witnessed its presentation on former occasions were more than charmed with the perfect setting of the well known scenes and the smoothness of action which characterized the production at this time . . .

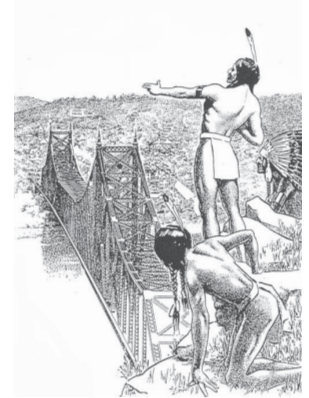
*SVHS is still attempting to locate a copy of "Skeins."*



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**Sewickley, PA 15143**

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**October 2019**



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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.*

Dr. & Mrs. George Berry, George J. Berry III & Kathleen M. Hale, Bobbi & Hal Bonnett, Barbara Briller, W. Brewster Cockrell, Keith & Patricia Droz, Anne Clarke Ronce, Daniel & Mackie Rossi, John S. Wendt III, Joe Zemba

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*Special Contributions*

Simon Noel – Film Restoration

*In Memoriam*

James C. Chaplin IV



*SVHS Film Restoration Fund*

Because of the popularity of our recent showing of restored vintage films, SVHS has received several films from members and local organizations. They will be evaluated for their historical significance, and it will be determined whether or not they are candidates for restoration, an expensive process running about \$1/foot of film. In order to offset costs, we are accepting contributions to a new Film Restoration Fund.

**DVDs of the 1940 Centennial movie will be available for purchase soon.**

**Watch for details in the November issue of *Signals*.**