Sewickley Valley Historical Society

Signals

XLVII, Number 4 March 2020

Wednesday, March 25, 2020
7:30 p.m., at the Old Sewickley Post Office

Behind Their Lines:
Forgotten Voices of the First World War

A PowerPoint Presentation by
Dr. Connie Ruzich

Dr. Ruzich will share photographs, letters, poems, and other first-hand accounts that give a picture of the American experience in the First World War. Rather than focusing on military strategies and battles, the lecture will instead look at the stories and accounts of people who lived through the world's first industrial war and will answer the question: What did it feel like to be an American during World War I?

Dr. Connie Ruzich was a 2014-2015 Fulbright Scholar at the University of Exeter, where she researched the use of poetry in British centenary commemorations of the First World War. She is the editor of the forthcoming *International Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology of Lost Voices*, to be published by Bloomsbury in fall of 2020. Her blog, "Behind Their Lines," has nearly 450,000 site visits and is endorsed by the United States World War I Centennial Commission. The blog focuses on lesser-known poetry of WWI, providing research on international lost voices and poems written by noncombatants. Dr. Ruzich's article "Land Girls of the First World War" appears on the University of Oxford/JISC's website "World War I Centenary: Continuations and Beginnings." Dr. Ruzich is a professor of English at Robert Morris University.

Nominating Committee

Members of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society Nominating Committee for 2020/2021 are:
Jay Brooks – Chairman, Bobbi Bonnett, Susan Cockrell, Sasha Koledin and Marian Miller.
In accordance with the *Bylaws*, the Committee will present its report at the meeting on March 25, 2020.

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.

Further Perambulations of Bayard Christy

This month we revisit the notebooks of Sewickley birder and naturalist Bayard Christy, recently presented to the Historical Society by the Hegner family. From his home base on Frederick Avenue in Sewickley, Christy spent a lifetime on expeditions near and far to observe birds. His supreme bird experience came in May of 1942, when he and his friend Roger Tory Peterson, author of the famous *Field Guide to the Birds*, traveled to the 40,000-acre Singer tract in Louisiana to find the ivory-bill, America's largest woodpecker, then approaching extinction. Peterson stated,

> I joined my old friend Bayard Christy, a man just turned seventy who desperately wanted to see an ivorybill before he died…. After an exhausting search just as we were about to call it quits, a startling new sound came from our right—a tooting note, musical in a staccato way. It was an ivorybill! I had expected it to sound like a nuthatch; it was more like the "toy tin trumpet" described by Alexander Wilson or the "clarinet" of Audubon. Breathlessly we stalked the insistent toots, stepping carefully so that no twig would crack. Hearts pounding, we tried to keep cool, hardly daring to believe that this was what we had come 1500 miles to see. An occasional blow would land—whop!—like the sound of an ax. Straining our eyes, we discovered the first bird. This was no puny pileated woodpecker; this was a whacking big bird, with great white patches on its wings and a gleaming white bill. By its long re-curved black crest we knew it was a female. We were close enough to see its pale yellow eyes. Tossing its hammer-like head to right and left, it tested the diseased trunk with a whack or two as it jerked upward. Taking off from the end of a broken-off branch, it flew in a straight line, like a duck, its wings making a wooden sound. Another female joined the first. We had no trouble following them, for as soon as they landed they sounded off with their curious henk, henk. We had a feeling of unreality as we watched them. They looked downright archaic. We followed the big woodpeckers for nearly an hour before we lost them.

While not officially labelled as extinct, today the species is listed as critically endangered and possibly extinct by the International Union of Conservation of Nature.

June 25, 1916

A brilliant summer Sunday, after weeks of rain. The sun is at the solstice, his beams are brightest, and his day at the longest of all the year. He shines down upon a green, green earth, upon grain fields heavy with full ears, as yet scarcely whitening to harvest; he reddens the cherries and the strawberries by the roadside. The elderberry blossoms open their creamy crowns to the wide day. Bobolink and oriole, who sang so lustily in summer's front, have in these riper days stopped their pipes.

Frank [Hegner] and I took a mid-day train to Rochester and walked to Beaver Knob and thence home. It is the only time I have visited the Knob and not been obliged to hurry away to make the train. The leisureliness was most agreeable.

At the start we had the company of a couple of boys who with pails in hand were wandering vaguely to "the country" in search of cherries. They aspired (with eager sympathy) to keep us company and manfully taxed themselves to keep pace with us; but they soon turned away when it appeared we had no concern for high adventure. We lost again a glimpse into the world of boyhood.

The first strawberries are ripe by the roadside, with their wild acid sweetness, bearing such relation to garden berries as a partridge does to a hen in the barnyard. What elegance of form the natural berry has! a great drop of nectar, dripping from the rim of summer's chalice. And how the racy juices tickle the palate! We would not have them by the quart—no, that is well enough with the common domestic fruit—but these we gather in bouquets, like flowers, and pluck them one by one between our lips. I remember eating wild strawberries in Paris; they were served on green leaves with a cream cheese called *petite Suisse*, and with sugar. They were very good so, but is not fruit at its very best when fresh plucked and eaten, un-withered and still warm with the sunshine which has pursed it full of sweetness?

We found a good many people abroad on this fair Sunday afternoon: boys and lovers and farm folk. At a crossroads, where a schoolhouse stands in a grove, a grimy tent had been erected, and under its shade on flimsy benches was gathered a small audience, listening to the earnestness of a spare man in a black seersucker coat.

In a strip of woodland, where the air was cool and the roadway of damp pliant clay, we were greeted from the undergrowth with an emphatic challenging bird-note. *Quoit*, it said, and repeated at intervals its single note, *quoit*, *quoit*. The call was not new, not strange, though certainly unfamiliar. Was it a chat [a warbler]? Perhaps. But assent was given with reservation. We gave the bird lover's squeaking call upon our fingers, and instantly a towhee [a songbird of the bunting family] dashed from the greenness on one side and a veery [a woodland thrush] from the other. We shall know veery next time without seeing him.

At a good vantage point Frank lifted me on his shoulders that I might get a picture of the Knob without too much immediate foreground. Beaver Knob is no great eminence, after all. It rises 1545 [sic, 1383] feet above sea level and perhaps two hundred feet higher than the surrounding hills. The surprising thing is that it is pre-eminent, even in so small a degree. The hills about rise to a common height, or near it; they form a peneplane [a level land surface caused by erosion over a long period of time]. Looking abroad from the summit of any one of them, the horizon line is straight, and as level as at sea. Here one crest and only one, forest clad and shadowy, lifts island-like above the blue rim of the world. In fair weather it may be seen from afar, from Wexford, from Sharon Church, from Clinton. Why should it excel the others? The question goes to a mountain of thought not so easily scaled.

For, in the backward and abysm of time, all that we look out upon, all these hills, all these shales and sandstones beneath our feet, were built from the wear and tear of a primeval world; the crumbling dust of ancient mountains, born in the turgid rush of forgotten streams, thrown out to settle upon the level floors of ocean, is the stuff our hills are made of. Who, traversing that ocean of scientific dreamland—who, when the waters were dried off from the earth, looking out over a wide marsh land, could have said, Here, one day, will extend a fair land of sunlit hills and shaded valleys, of forested slopes and rippling streams; here precisely will rise one crest out-topping all the hills about? We read the geological report; we note the massive sandstone bed which, resisting erosion, has protected the underlying strata; we study the contour map and find that the Knob rises indeed precisely on the water-shed, remote from rapid wear of swift-flowing streams; our minds open with interest and attention to these things, and we fall to thinking, and our imaginations are quickened to make our thoughts real to us. And yet the peak of our mountain is not scaled; we have not yet reached the dwellings of the gods.

The Knob—strange to say—is really in Sewickley. It lies in a wide region, extending northward and eastward from the Ohio and Beaver rivers, to which, originally, the name Sewickley attached. The name is of Indian origin, a corruption of Azwigli, and the Azwigli were a tribe of the Delaware nation. [See "The Origin of the Name 'Sewickley'" in the May 2012 issue of *Signals*, which can be accessed from our website, www.sewickleyhistory.org.] These Azwigli, presumably, occupied this region. The flint arrow-head which I picked up one day on the slope of the Knob: in all likelihood it once tipped the weapon of a Sewickley hunter.

Traces of a wider use of the name Sewickley remain: two streams which water the region are called Little and Big Sewickley creeks; two townships of Beaver County are called North and South Sewickley Townships [today North and New Sewickley Townships]; our own valley as we know, was in the early days distinctively called Sewickley Bottoms, and the village was long known as Sewickleyville. It was not until the railroad had brought our village into new relations with the outer-world and in some degree divorced and separated it from its neighborhood, that the hybrid termination ville was dropped from its name. To the world at large Sewickley was a sufficient designation for the little town.

We sat for half an hour or more on the hill top, enjoying the green shade and the wide blue summit outlook. It was past four o'clock when we set out, though the June sun was still high in the sky. We had no difficulty in taking photographs on the way. Even at Rehoboth Church [Rehoboth Evangelical Lutheran Church, Baden, PA], which we reached after five, there was light enough to get the wide horizon and the distant wooded summit of the Knob.

Frank stopped to see his friends the Habermans, and in consequence we were constrained to sit down with them to supper in their garden.

We left the Haberman farm after sunset, and it was ten o'clock when we reached home. The pleasantest incident of our evening walk was the climb from the Big Sewickley valley to the hill-tops. We passed a dooryard and an orchard in the twilight, then climbed a hillside pasture, crossed a strip of woodland where whip-poor-wills were calling, and came to the crest while the western sky was still roseate, and the valley below sinking into the shades of night.

Sewickley Valley Historical Society
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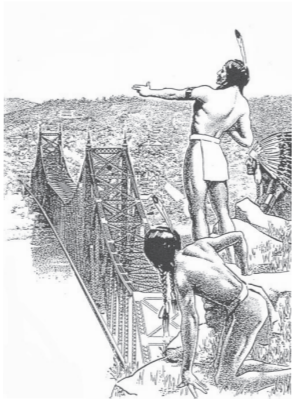

March 2020

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Special Contributions

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In Memoriam

Lannie Gartner; Elsie Young Lewis; John Morrow; Phyllis A. Schell; Mary Jane Williams

Signals is designed and edited by Susan C. Holton. Visit our website, www.sewickleyhistory.org — e-mail us at info@sewickleyhistory.org — or call us at 412-741-5315. We're open 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, or by appointment.