

Sewickley Valley Historical Society

Signals

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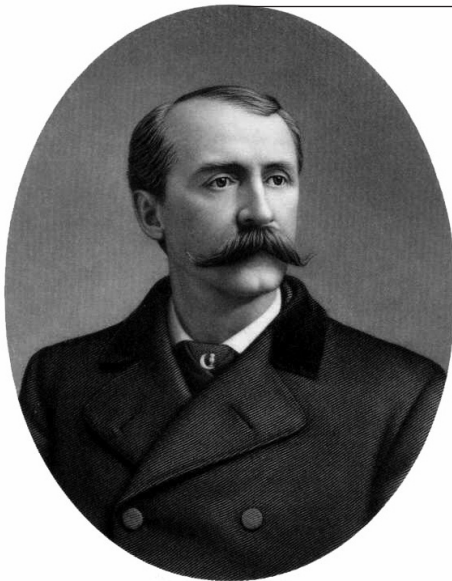
Wednesday, November 19, 2008

7:00 p.m., at the Sewickley Heights History Center
1901 Glen Mitchell Road, 412-741-4487

Col. James M. Schoonmaker

*Civil War Hero, Coal and Coke Operator,
Banker and Railroad Executive*

an illustrated lecture by Frank Kurtik



J. M. Schoonmaker

James Martinus Schoonmaker was born in Allegheny City on June 30, 1842. He enlisted in the Union Army in 1861 while a student at Western University (now the University of Pittsburgh). In November 1862, at age twenty, he was elected colonel of the newly raised 14th Pennsylvania Volunteer Cavalry, becoming the youngest officer of that rank in the Army of the Potomac. He was assigned command in 1864 of the first brigade of Gen. Averill's division of the Army of the Shenandoah. In 1899, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for leading a charge during an engagement with Confederate forces at Winchester, Virginia; and in 1913, in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg, he was selected as the outstanding Civil War veteran of the State of Pennsylvania. Schoonmaker purchased *Bellamona*, the Quay house on Sewickley Heights (now razed), in 1915. He had three children: Gretchen, William and James, Jr., who built *Pen-Y-Bryn* on Merriman Road in 1938.

Join us at the Sewickley Heights History Center to learn more about this hero, whose post-war work in the coke and coal business, the Union Trust Company, Mellon National Bank, Union Savings Bank and the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad makes for a fascinating story.

A lifelong resident of southwestern Pennsylvania, historian Frank Kurtik is currently engaged in private historical research and writing projects as well as presenting lectures on a wide range of regional topics. He also gives specialized tours of Pittsburgh architecture and history. He holds an undergraduate degree in American Studies from California University of Pennsylvania and a Master's in American History from Duquesne University. After serving as an archivist at the University of Pittsburgh, he became curator of the historical collections of the Heinz family, for whom he did genealogical research and prepared the family's first genealogical chart. His articles have appeared in such publications as the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* and the *Carnegie Magazine*.

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.

Recent Gifts

This summer, the Historical Society received an exciting donation: some twenty-five pieces of clothing that belonged to either Mrs. B. F. Jones, Jr. (Sue Duff Dalzell Jones, 1866-1941), or her daughter, Mrs. John O. Burgwin (Adelaide Dalzell Jones Burgwin, 1896-1979). The late 19th and early 20th century garments were the gift of Mrs. Margaret Vincent of West Hartford, CT, Mrs. Jones's great-granddaughter. They include opulent two-piece gowns (one, "Alice Blue"), tea dresses, petticoats, corset covers, two girl's dresses, and the beautiful crocheted lace jacket pictured here. The garments have been photographed, described, packed in archival tissue and placed in archival storage boxes. We hope, one day, to display them to the community.



Another major donation is an oil painting on panel by Kenyon Cox of William Anderson Coffin at Jennerstown, PA, signed at lower right, "To My Friend W. A. Coffin, Kenyon Cox 1885." The painting is the gift of J. Robert Aydelotte, whose wife, Virginia, was a niece of Coffin.

Kenyon Cox (1856-1919) was born in Warren, Ohio. His father was Governor of Ohio, Secretary of the Interior under President Grant and served a term in the U. S. House of Representatives; his mother was the daughter of Charles Grandison Finney, a founder of Oberlin College. Cox studied art at the McMicken Art School in Cincinnati, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia and the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. In 1883, he moved to New York City, where he worked primarily as a magazine and book illustrator. He later became one of the country's most important traditionalist art critics and a leading painter in the classical style, particularly of murals in state capitols (St. Paul, MN; Des Moines, IA; and Madison, WI), courthouses (New York City; Wilkes-Barre, PA; and Newark, NJ) and other public buildings, such as the Library of Congress. He was best known as a supporter of a style derived from Renaissance models and as an opponent of modernism. William A. Coffin, a fellow painter and his good friend, said of Cox in 1891, "No painter among us has a purer sense of beauty in the ideal, and no one has a keener perception of grace in form and distinction of color in nature."

You may remember the work of William Anderson Coffin (1855-1925) that was on display in the *A Brush with History: Artists of the Sewickley Valley* exhibition at the Old Sewickley Post Office in 2000. Coffin was born in Allegheny City and lived at *Elm Ridge* in Leetsdale from 1870. (*Elm Ridge* is now the home of Joe Zemba, Sewickley Valley Historical Society President.) He studied at Yale and in Paris, opening a studio in New York in 1882. Known as a landscape painter and an art critic, he maintained a country home, *Pine Springs Farm*, at Jennerstown. It is his beautifully evocative Pennsylvania landscape paintings that are most often mentioned in discussions of his art, which is represented in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Yale University Art Museum, the Brooklyn Museum and the National Academy of Design, among other places.

The following letter, written by Cox to his mother from Leetsdale on June 29, 1885, describes a visit to *Elm Ridge* and to Old Economy. The letter is among the Kenyon Cox papers in the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University, New York City, and is published in *An Artist of the American*

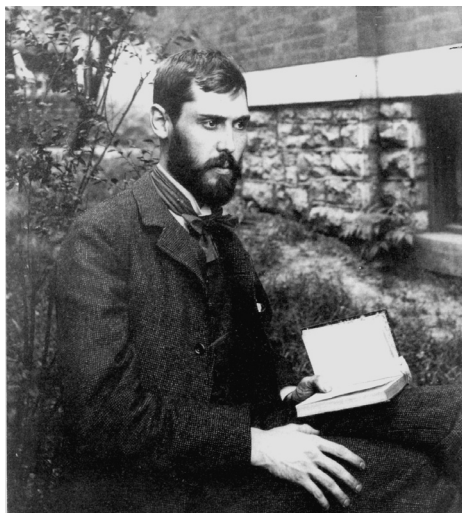
Renaissance: The Letters of Kenyon Cox, 1883-1919, edited by H. Wayne Morgan (Kent, OH, The Kent State University Press, 1995), p. 56-58.

"I think that [Leetsdale] is the name of this place. I arrived here with Coffin [William Anderson Coffin] Saturday morning, pretty tired from the long railway journey and the previous two or three days' agony of packing and running about in N.Y. Before we left, the keeper of the restaurant where we go, a German butcher, set up a lunch to us and the other artists, most of whom leave N.Y. for the summer very shortly also. It was a great success and there was good food, including delicious spring chicken, lobster and chicken salad, etc., and wine and champagne and—*tout le tremblement* [all the rest of it].

"This is a nice country place with grass and trees and good old fashioned people. Mrs. Coffin is a dear old lady. Coffin wanted to come here for a few days before setting off for his brother's farm, and insisted on my coming with him to see his parents. Mr. Coffin does business in Pittsburgh and comes out here every evening, and goes into town in the morning. Wednesday morning we are to get up at some unimaginable hour to start for the farm which is quite out of the world, three or four hours drive across the mountain from the nearest railway station, I believe.

"Today Mrs. Coffin wanted to go to Economy to get something and Coffin drove her over in the carriage and I went along, and was very glad I did so. It is a village founded by a community which came over from Germany in the latter part of the last century, and who call themselves the Society of Harmony. They founded two villages called Harmony, first in Pennsylvania about 1805 and then in Indiana, and finally came here in 1825. They do not marry, but the original members brought their children and grand-children and there are still a few of these left, though they are dying out rapidly. Now they are said to be very wealthy and everyone wonders what they will do with their money. Most of their land is let now to farmers, but, I believe only to Germans, and they take a great deal of pains to get only honest and industrious persons about them. We drove up in front of one of their quaint old houses and Mrs. Coffin got out to go in and see Miss Rapp (I believe), who is the granddaughter of the founder of the society [Gertrude Rapp, 1807-1889, was the founder's daughter]. Coffin and I sat out in the carriage. Presently, we saw old Mr. Henrici [Jacob Henrici, 1804-1892, principal successor to Johann Georg Rapp, 1757-1847, founder of the Harmonists] one of the trustees and the present head of the sect, coming along with a crowd of people who were questioning

him about everything. They went into the house and presently Mr. Henrici came out and said, 'You may come in the house too, both of you or one of you, but you must throw away your cigars.' I went in and found Mrs. Coffin sitting there. The old gentleman went out and while he was gone the inquisitive crowd were feeling up and looking at and prying into everything. It made me feel very uncomfortable and as if I was one of their crowd. Presently the old fellow came back with ginger cookies and wine (which they make and which is good). He was dressed in curious old clothes and a funny old broad-brimmed top hat, and had a shrewd, amusing old face, white curls and a white chin-whisker. The vulgar crowd were apparently total abstainers and wouldn't drink the wine, but they wanted to see the wine-cellar, whereupon he said, 'Then you are not afraid to look at it?' However, they got rid of those people shortly. Meanwhile, Miss Rapp (the loveliest old lady, with white hair under a queer purple cap and with a purple fichu about her neck) came in. The cap and fichu was [*sic*] of silk of their own make, and so is everything they use made on the premises. I was introduced to her and they soon made us feel the difference between the politeness with which they treated all strangers, and the particular friendliness for people they have long known and liked, as they evidently have Mrs. Coffin. We found Coffin enjoying his cookie and wine in the carriage and he was brought in too. He said afterwards that the old gentleman, who evidently did not recognize him at first, came out with the cake and wine and said, 'Young man, if you will promise not to smoke I will give you something to drink,' an irresistible appeal.



Kenyon Cox, 1880s-90s

"Then they showed us the garden, which is the loveliest place I have seen for a long time. The day has been gray and cloudy and very like the kind of weather one sees so much of in France, and the old garden, with its crooked apple trees and box hedges [illegible] and old fashioned flowers was so un-American and so like many an old place I have seen in France that I could scarcely believe I was on this side of the ocean. The lilies and poppies and pinks in their rows, and the pond with water lilies around it, the black gnarled tree trunks and the quaint old houses looking over the wall—all this under the gray light filtering through the branches and the dear little silver-haired, sweet-faced old lady gliding about would make a charming picture. When we came away, she made the gardener cut a lot of lettuce for us, and the last thing, brought out a paper bag full of green beans. She and Mr. Henrici are very well educated, I believe, and are certainly refined and polite, though very plain-spoken. They have a little German accent, which is very amusing. The legend is that when they settled here they were very poor.

They borrowed a barrel of flour and a little bacon and from that day paid their way and are now very rich. But if I write any more I will spoil you, so goodbye. KEN"



The Sewickley Valley Historical Society is planning a gala unveiling of the portrait as well as a lecture on the art of Kenyon Cox in January 2009. Details will follow!

A reminder...

holiday
mART

Don't forget that portions Dan Telep's award-winning philatelic exhibition, *Pittsburgh 1758-1890: The Industrial Gateway to the West; A Postal History of the Pittsburgh Post Office*, will be on display in Sewickley Valley Historical Society headquarters during Sweetwater's 14th annual **holiday mART**. You can view the show between 11:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m., Thursday, December 4 and Saturday, December 6; and 11:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m., Friday, December 5, Sewickley's "Light Up Night." Friday is also the evening to "Let the Men Cook!" So come for dinner, shop for handcrafted, unique works created by local and national artisans, and learn about the origins and development of the Pittsburgh Post Office.

New Members

Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan Gordon, Patricia S. Casella

Sponsors, Patrons, Benefactors

Thanks to the following, who have generously supported the Sewickley Valley Historical Society with gifts in addition to membership dues:

Nancy Baldwin; Melissa & Bill Cook; Mr. & Mrs. Timothy W. Merrill, Jr.; Beth & Ken Rom; Peter & Elizabeth Stein

In memory of David A. Ford

Carol Johnson Cooper

Holiday Events at



Christmas with Belsnickel November 29, 10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Belsnickel, St. Nick's helper, will check his great book to see which children were good and which were bad. Children will decorate a gingerbread man, make a tree-top Belsnickel, visit the Village decorated for Christmas and enjoy a holiday treat. For ages 6 - 12. Pre-registration & prepayment required by November 25th. Call (724) 266-4500, ext. 101.

Christmas at the Village: A Century of Change December 6, 2:00-8:30 p.m

See how technological changes were reflected in the ways the Harmonists celebrated Christmas. Tour the decorated Village, enjoy musical performances and shop at the *Weihnachtsmarkt*. Kids and their parents will enjoy hands-on activities, carriage rides and *das Kinderhaus*.

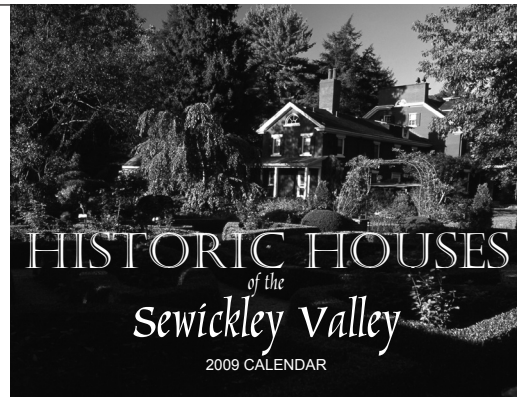
Enjoy delicious homemade German food prepared by members of St. John's Lutheran Church. Parking shuttle service is available.

Christmas Fundraiser Dinner December 13, 6:00 p.m.

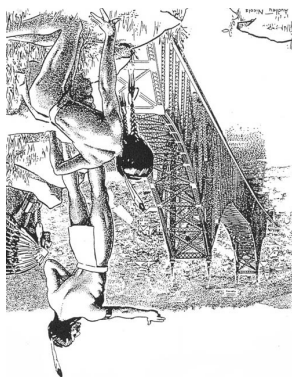
Enjoy a special evening with dinner in the historic Feast Hall and musical performances. Sponsored by the Friends of Old Economy Village. Proceeds from this event support website development and the continued preservation of the site. For reservations, call (724) 266-4500, ext. 101..

2009 Historic Houses Calendar Sale! Now Only \$10!

Edgeworth Preservation's 1996 book *Historic Houses of the Sewickley Valley* may be out of print, but thirteen of the glorious William J. Penberthy photographs of Sewickley Valley houses can be yours in a new publication of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society, *Historic Houses of the Sewickley Valley: 2009 Calendar*. This large format (12" x 9"), full color calendar on heavy stock is available at the Historical Society for \$10. You'll also find other SVHS publications for sale—postcards, notecards, books on Sewickley history, maps... Here's a chance to get a head start on your holiday shopping!



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



November 2008

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