

Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

XXXVI, Number 2

October 2008

Wednesday, October 22, 2008

7:00 p.m. (NOTE NEW TIME)

Old Sewickley Post Office

African Americans in Sewickley Valley

a presentation by
Bettie Cole & Autumn Redcross



Ellis A. Blockson's truck, 1916

Sewickley Valley Historical Society, in conjunction with Sweetwater Center for the Arts, is proud to cap off MAVUNO XII, Sweetwater's annual celebration of African American art and culture, with this illustrated lecture. Bettie Cole and Autumn Redcross's new book, *African Americans in Sewickley Valley*, is part of Arcadia Publishing's *Images of America* series. The presentation will be followed by refreshments and a book signing.

The African Americans of Sewickley Valley have a history as rich and deep-rooted as the Valley itself. Early residents brought black servants with them to serve as domestics; many African Americans migrated here, primarily from Virginia and Kentucky, to work as builders. From Jim Robinson, brought to Sewickley Bottom as a servant by the Shields family in 1823, through the annual "Come on Home" reunions of recent years, *African Americans in Sewickley Valley* documents the life and ambitions of the African Americans who make up a vital part of the Sewickley community today.

Bettie Cole, noted local historian and author, has partnered with genealogist, lecturer and newcomer Autumn Redcross to compile and annotate this intriguing collection of historic photographs.



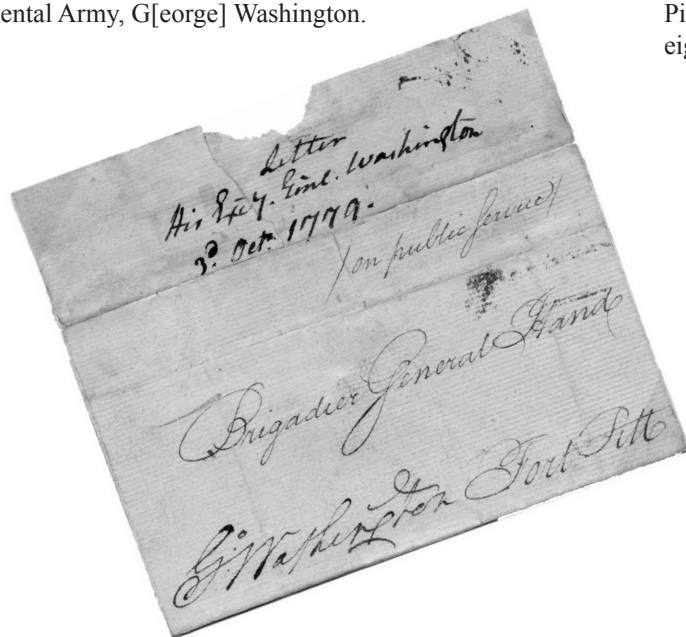
We hope that the proposed expansion of Duquesne Light's Sewickley substation later this year will not adversely affect the structure seen at left in a 1930s photo. In the October 24, 1979, issue of the *Sewickley Herald*, under a later photo of this wall, is written, "You've heard the expression 'Just a façade' and Sewickley has a perfect example in this Art Deco masterpiece on Chadwick Street. You may have passed it many times, but how many know what is behind all the fancy frontage...?" This decorative wall, in fact, hides the power company's substation. A mixed media, Moderne style, 12-foot wall of white brick and tile, it has a wrought iron grille with the figure of a torch-bearer backed by a colored tile panel with a cloud-and-flame motif. The wall is included in Walter C. Kidney's *Pittsburgh's Landmark Architecture: The Historic Buildings of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County* (Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, 1997). While it is not, today, in the pristine condition shown in this photo, the ensemble is important as an example of a style not often seen in our area and should be restored and preserved.

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.

Pittsburgh 1758-1890: The Industrial Gateway to the West A Postal History of the Pittsburgh Post Office

This exhibition, which appeared in September at a national philatelic show in Philadelphia, tells the story of the origin and development of the Pittsburgh Post Office, from its beginnings at Fort Pitt through the usages of the Bank Note issues of 1875-1889. The show was put together by Dan Telep, Sewickley Valley Historical Society board member, and commemorates the founding of Pittsburgh on its 250th anniversary, November 25, 2008. First shown in 1993, when it was awarded a gold medal, the collection has matured and developed into a more complete story that includes a stronger representation of the Revolutionary War period. In the exhibition are manuscripts, handstamps, adhesives, stamped envelopes and postal cards illustrating various rates, usages, routes and markings. A large portion of the items reflect a commercial advertising theme.

Included is the Free Frank seen below, which was docketed on October 9, 1779, addressed in another hand to the Commanding Officer at Fort Pitt and signed by the Commanding Officer of the Continental Army, George Washington.



Also in the exhibition is this 3¢ stamped envelope, dated March 18, 1864, from Confederate prisoner of war Lieutenant Van J. Sellers, who was captured in Morgan's Raid in Southern Ohio and taken to Pittsburgh and Allegheny City Penitentiary, where he would serve eight months.



Portions of the exhibition will be on display in Sewickley Valley Historical Society headquarters during Sweetwater Center for the Arts' 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. on Friday, December 5, Sewickley's "Light Up Night." During these hours, Mr. Telep will be available to explain more about the material.

"The Bar Fly"

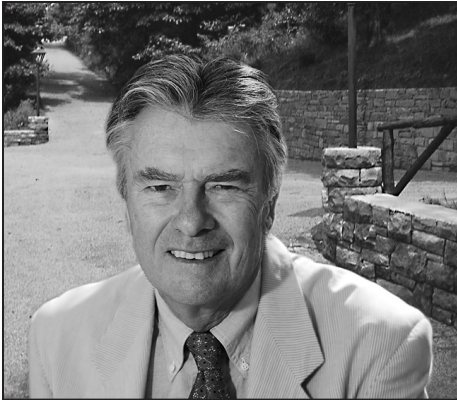
A recent addition to the SVHS archives are drafts of several issues of a home-grown publication that kept Sewickleyites serving in the military during World War II up on news from the home front: *The Bar Fly*. Published by Joseph D. Dury (back in Sewickley after having received a medical discharge from the U. S. Army) and edited by Betty Buffington (Berg), volume I, number 1, dated October 6, 1943, was sent to about 25 of "the gang." It began with the following disclaimer: "Any similarity to persons living or dead is purely coincidental. Comments do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the publishers. Do you know any gossip that's printable? We'll send it on and save you the trouble of writing letters to everyone. The more news we get, the oftener we can put this paper-waster out."

What followed on the typewritten sheets was gossip, news from abroad and from various postings around the country, plus engagements and weddings, all related with acerbic wit. The rag proved to be so popular that the Junior League of Pittsburgh eventually took over its production and included news from the entire Pittsburgh area.

Issues of *The Bar Fly* were a gift to the Historical Society by Joe and Peggy Dury. If you want to walk down Memory Lane, come in and see what was going on sixty-five years ago in Sewickley. You might just be able read about yourself (or your parents or grandparents) in these humorous pages.



A New Book with Sewickley Connections



James Oliver Goldsborough

Photo by Sam Hodgson

James Oliver Goldsborough, an award-winning journalist who has written on national and foreign affairs for four decades, has recently published a new book, *Misfortunes of Wealth*. A graduate of UCLA, he attended UC Berkeley Law School and later served in Special Services in the U. S. Army. He has reported for the *New York Herald Tribune*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Toronto Star* and *Newsweek* magazine. A former Edward R. Murrow Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment, his previous book, *Rebel Europe: Living with a Changing Continent*, received high praise. He has been a reporter, editor and columnist for the *San Francisco Examiner*, *Honolulu Advertiser*, *Arizona Republic*, *San Jose Mercury-News* and *San Diego Union Tribune* and is a contributor to the *New York Times Magazine*, *Fortune*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *Readers' Digest* and *Politique Étrangere*. He currently writes for the on-line newspaper *Voice of San Diego* and resides in San Diego.

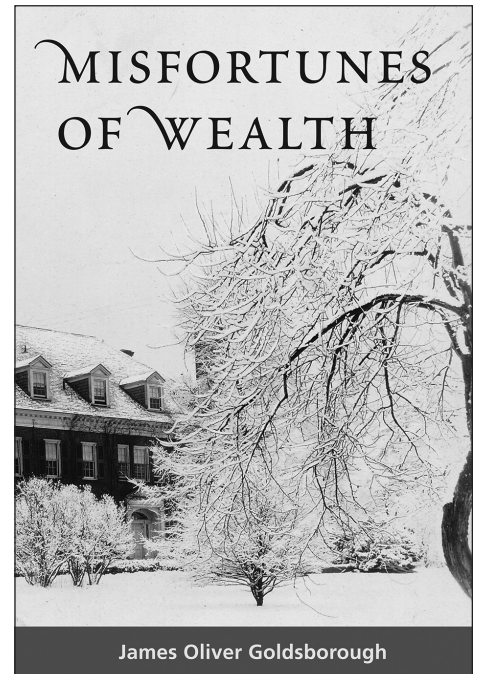
But there are definite Sewickley connections! Jim is the grandson of William J. and Amelia Oliver Crittenden, nephew of Dr. John Oliver Crittenden, and spent the summers of his youth at the Crittenden home in Edgeworth, "Sucasa." His family tree is populated not only with Crittendens, but also with Shieldses, Olivers, Nevilles and Craigs. According to the "sell sheet" for the book,

Misfortunes of Wealth explores one of American society's endlessly fascinating scenarios, the one where inherited wealth and family intersect, not always to the good. Best of all, the story is true. James Goldsborough takes the reader on a journey beginning with Revolutionary War heroes down through succeeding generations of Civil War notables, industrial titans, an improbable love story ... and finally a son who not only survives but thrives.

The story is one of east and west, north and south; Western Pennsylvania, land of opportunity in the Republic's early years and later a seat of eastern high society; California immediately after World War II; dreams of railroads and then an airline to open up vast territories of Mexico; brother-against-brother in war; exotic adventures and improbable schemes; lives fulfilled and lives wasted. [The book] portrays the schizophrenia of people ricocheting between vast opportunity and the inability to make a life in the shadow of great wealth.

...These are not far-away characters in a fairy tale but real flesh-and blood human beings speaking through the generations.

Misfortunes of Wealth, published by The Local History Company, Pittsburgh, is a 308-page, hard cover book, 6" x 9", with over 75 photos, maps and drawings. It is available for \$27.95 plus tax from Sewickley Valley Historical Society; add \$5.00 postage and handling for mail orders. **Note:** If you have a "\$5 off" coupon for the book, it is redeemable at the Historical Society until October 31, 2008.



Sponsors, Patrons, Benefactors

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

Dr. & Mrs. George Berry; Mr. & Mrs. Harold Bonnett; Kathryn & Michael Bryson; Peter & Linda Floyd; Margie Gilfillan; Polly & Thomas Lechner; Kirsten McCormack; Marian Miller; Charlotte B. Schroeder; Samuel & Judith Spanos

New Members

Robert Hegner; Alec Lander; Polly & Thomas Lechner; Mercedes (Merci) McCarthy; Kirsten McCormack; Linda G. Schortz; Terry L. Smith; Maureen Valenzi

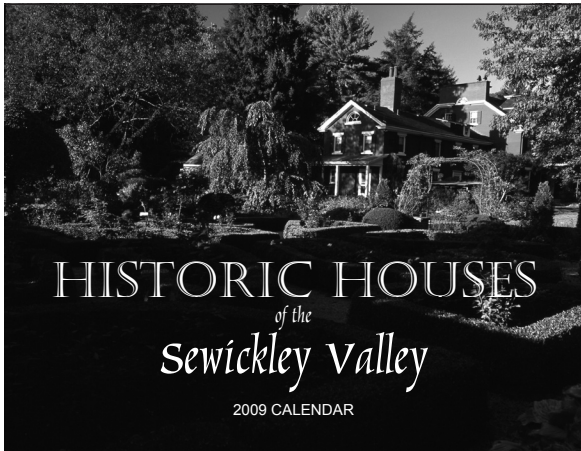
Antebellum House Tour of Allegheny City

October 11, 2008, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Join the Allegheny City Society on a first ever tour of Allegheny City before the Civil War. Learn and view history from a mini-bus and explore Antebellum homes, such as the Col. James Anderson House (at right).

Price: Members \$50.00; Non-Members \$55.00
Price includes lunch. Limited seating.

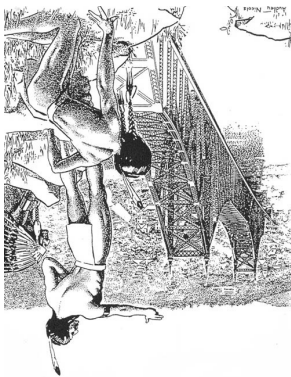
Information and reservations
Call 412-364-6132 or email theruths03@yahoo.com



2009 Historic Houses Calendar

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 brand 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 \$15. 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 am-2:00 pm, Tuesday through Friday, or by appointment.



October 2008

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