

Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

XXXVI, Number 1

September 2008

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

7:30 p.m.

Old Sewickley Post Office

Resurrecting Allegheny City:

The Land, Structures & People of Pittsburgh's North Side

An illustrated lecture by Lisa A. Miles

Join us in celebrating Pittsburgh's 250th anniversary with Lisa Miles's presentation on her 2007 book, *Resurrecting Allegheny City*. John Canning of the Allegheny City Society has called the book "Exciting... the first work to sift through tons of documents that present a much broader picture of the history of Allegheny City. It introduces us to new ways of looking at how Allegheny, and other cities of that period in history, developed... examining the nuts and bolts of an American city's transformation in the 19th century." Jerry Ellis of the Pennsylvania State Archives says, "With this book, Lisa Miles has opened the trunk.... Like papers in the attic, [it] resurrects this partly forgotten city, progressive in its era, and deserved of remembrance." Sewickleyans will remember that, when Pittsburgh annexed Allegheny City in 1906, many of Allegheny's residents moved to their country homes on Sewickley Heights.

Lisa A. Miles, in addition to writing, plays the violin and writes music, collaborating with theater, film and dance artists. She has been awarded grants for her writing, music, creative work and teaching by the Pennsylvania Arts & Humanities Council, the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, the Heinz Endowments, the Pittsburgh Foundation and the Buhl Foundation.

Refreshments and a book signing will follow the presentation.



Proceeds to benefit Sewickley Heights History Center
For further information, call 412-741-4487

The Annual
Sewickley Heights History Center
*Riding & Driving
Party*

Saturday, September 27, 4:00 p.m.

ANTIQUE CARS & CARRIAGES
EQUESTRIAN EXHIBITION, THE HUNT
COCKTAILS, DINNER & DANCING

Special reduced donation
for SVHS members: \$60

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.

The following, copied from Captain Fred Way's remarks in his *Inland River Record*, was sent to us by Joseph W. Rutter, Way's son-in-law.



The Changing Climate

[as predicted by Capt. Fred Way in 1956!]

But now to more pleasant topics. Modern river transportation is feeling the beneficence of a Mother Nature who has unexplainably tempered the weather of the Mississippi basin. We would be remiss not to mention this blessing. The moderating winters have piled up a staggering increase in waterway ton-miles. Today, January 5, 1956, our Western Pennsylvania climate is cold, and has been unseasonably sub-temperate since November. Even so, the evidence is overwhelming. Our neighbor, Max Henrici, saw 40 robins in a single ash tree last week. Dr. Douitt says the common 'possum has invaded Vermont, unknown there in 1935, but now quite commonly seen. The Greenland glaciers are melting at a rapidly increasing rate, so much so that their waters contribute significantly to the general rise of the Atlantic sea level. The Florida palm tree is on a stately march northward. Quite some wonderful exhibition to us rivermen who remember 1917-1918 with the whole Ohio River closed from mid-

December until February 20, choked with gorged ice. Not in the least do we prophesy no future recurrence of Boreas [Greek god of the North Wind], but the fact remains that since the commencing of the Diesel Age, the Western Waters have enjoyed a singular freedom and relaxation during the winter months. It would be hard indeed to convince younger rivermen that Allegheny river ice has, in times past, floated intact to the New Orleans harbor.

Let us count our blessings as they come to us, and at the same time forget not that our beloved naturalist John Burroughs [1837-1921, writer and essayist important in the evolution of the U. S. conservation movement], away back about 1870, predicted that the annual rainfall is tapering off. Storage dams on headwater streams may one day lose their importance as flood retarders and single-purpose into the needs of thirsty populations and as the suppliers of that wet stuff that floats river traffic.

Sponsors, Patrons, Benefactors

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

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In Memoriam

David A. Ford; G. Christian Lantzsch; Otto Weiss, Jr.

Gifts in Memory of David A. Ford

Mr. & Mrs. Ronald Dornetta, Mr. & Mrs. Philip Dunham, Carole Moore Ford, Mr. & Mrs. Philip Lanzarotta, Henriette Rougraff, Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Walter, Mr. & Mrs. Malachy Whalen

New Members

Mr. & Mrs. Frank Brooks III, Birmingham, MI; Bill & Dilly Burns, Winnipeg, Canada; Michael D. & Cynthia J. Mullins, Sewickley; Heather Semple, Sewickley; Arthur D. Vanick, Manhattan Beach, CA

Some Recent Gifts

The depth and scope of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society collection of artifacts, documents and photographs derives directly from the continuing generosity of the Society's members and friends who continue to donate their treasures to be preserved for posterity. A number of wonderful items have come in lately. Please remember the virtue of preserving the history of the Sewickley Valley, as these benefactors did, when you are cleaning out the attic or downsizing. Don't throw all that good stuff away; bring it to us. We will conserve and cherish it.

Stephen Davis donated an original copy, in excellent condition, of the ninth edition of Zadoc Cramer's famous *Navigator*, published in 1817. Anyone navigating the Allegheny, Monongahela, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in the early 19th century by flatboat, keelboat or steam would have had this guide in his possession or would have been acquainted with its content. This particular volume has a checkered past. It was in the library of a Dr. Frank L. James of Mobile, Alabama, in 1848; at some point it resided in the Harvard College Library before being deaccessioned; and then it belonged to the Dann family, Mr. Dann being President of Dravo's Barge Line. There is an on-line reprint of the book at <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupid?key=olbp15012>.

James Grimes Park, great grandson of Sewickley Borough tax collector William Grimes, presented three leather-bound ledgers listing tax payments made in Sewickley Borough for the years 1855, 1857 and 1863. William Fisher Grimes (1817-1879, a teamster by profession, lived on Blackburn Avenue and was one of the original incorporators of Sewickley Cemetery in 1859. These records are invaluable, as they contain the names of all the heads of households who paid state, county, poor (for charity), school and borough taxes, complementing the information available in the federal census. Mr. Grimes also kept his business records in these ledgers, revealing what was hauled in those days: sand, gravel, stone, brick, water, lime, coal, firewood, lumber, lath, posts, rails, sawdust, ice, manure, hay, grain, ground corn, potatoes and apples.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard L. Anderson of Eustis, FL, allowed us to copy a large file of materials relating to the Dickson and Watts families of Edgeworth. The patriarchs were Dr. John S. Dickson (1812-1886), who practiced medicine in Allegheny City and Sewickley, and Charles Watts (1845-1920), Superintendent of Passenger Traffic on the Pennsylvania Railroad Lines West.



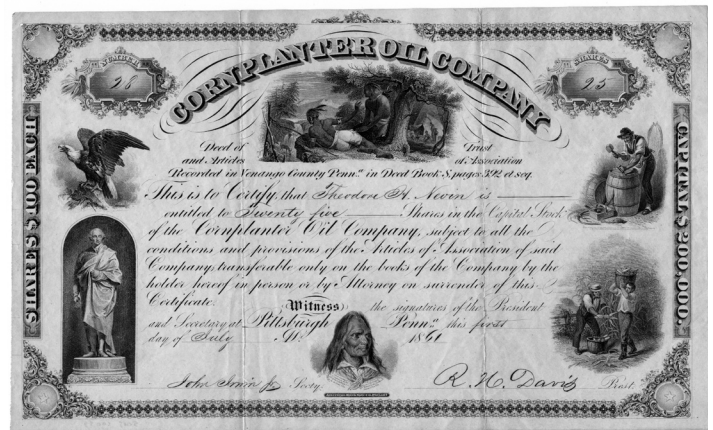
Dr. John S. Dickson (1812-1886)



Charles Watts (1845-1920)

The families came together in 1902 when Hortense Elaine Watts married Dr. Robert Watson Dickson, son of Dr. John Dickson. Among the material was a brochure from the 1920s advertising a round trip voyage on the *Betsy Ann*, on which Sewickley's Frederick Way, Jr., served as purser (and later captain). Way and

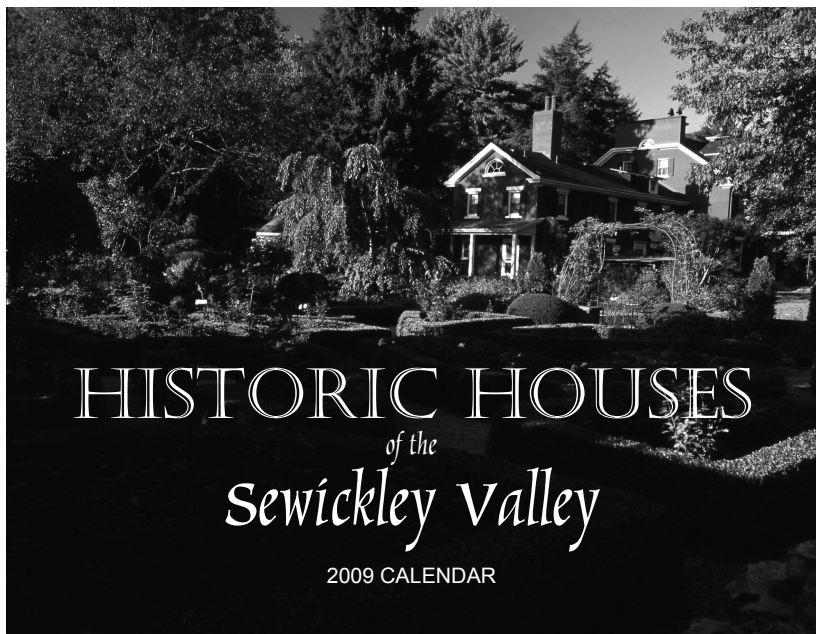
his father owned the vessel. The round trip, seven day voyage from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati, distance 468 miles, cost \$35, complete with meals! Fred Way, Jr., was related to the Dicksons. In 1838, Dr. John Dickson married Mary Ann Way, a daughter of Nicholas and Nancy Way, granddaughter of the Edgeworth pioneer Squire John Way. Also included, and perhaps most valuable to history, is a hand drawn map of Edgeworth and Sewickley showing most structures and owners, circa 1910.



Hugh and Eliza Nevin presented a treasure trove of Nevin family material consisting of books and photographs, letters, ledgers and genealogical materials, primarily pertaining to two of the Nevin brothers: Robert Peebles Nevin (1820-1908), writer and newspaper editor, father of musicians Arthur and Ethelbert Nevin; and Theodore Hugh Nevin (1815-1884), banker and paint manufacturer. Particularly intriguing is a collection of clipped signatures of many family members—assorted Nevins, Irwins, Adairs and Travellis. There is also a classic Sewickley item included: a 1861 stock certificate (see above) for twenty-five shares at \$100 each of the Cornplanter Oil Company in the name of Theodore H. Nevin. The certificate is signed by Robert H. Davis, President of the company, and by John Irwin, Jr., Secretary. Robert Hudman Davis (1814-1881), a lumber merchant, had purchased the 43-acre farm of Robert Peebles in what is now Glen Osborne in 1855 and was married to Eliza Cochran. John Irwin, Jr., whom the 1960 federal census styles a "Gentleman," was investing the family wealth generated by the first rope walk west of the mountains, founded by his father, Major John Irwin. So we have evidence of three prominent Sewickley residents investing in the new oil fields in the Oil Creek, Pennsylvania, area, where Colonel Edwin L. Drake had just drilled the first viable oil well in 1859.

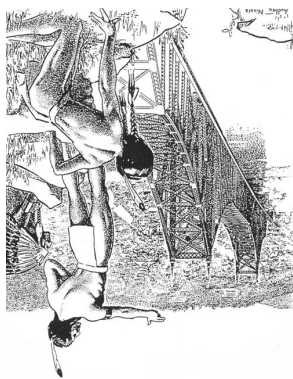
Finally, Robert R. Hegner presented us with biographical and genealogical information as well as photos relating to the George Hegner and E. H. Beall families of Sewickley.

2009 Historic Houses Calendar Available for Holiday Giving!



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 will be available for purchase at the Historical Society's pavilion at Sewickley's Harvest Festival on Saturday, September 6th, 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 — or e-mail us at sewickleyhistory@verizon.net.



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