

Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

XXXVII, Number 3

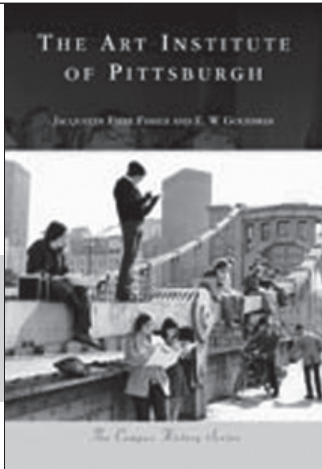
November 2009

Willis Shook:

Sewickley Resident & Founder of The Art Institute of Pittsburgh

an illustrated presentation by

Willis D. Shook, III, M.D., &
Jacquelyn Felix Fisher



Wednesday, November 18, 2009, 7:00 p.m.

The Presbyterian Church of Sewickley, Ansby Hall

In the early 1920s, young Pittsburgh artist and designer Willis Dresdale Shook recognized the need for a two-year course in commercial art in the city, and on October 1, 1921, he founded the Artist's League of Pittsburgh, which held its first class of nine students in one room of the Fulton Building. Within two years, the name changed to the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. Shook directed the school until the late 1960s. Almost 90 years after its founding, the Art Institute has grown to a community of more than 13,000 students and over 55,000 alumni, who are making their mark on the art, design, advertising, motion picture, entertainment, business, fashion and culinary industries.

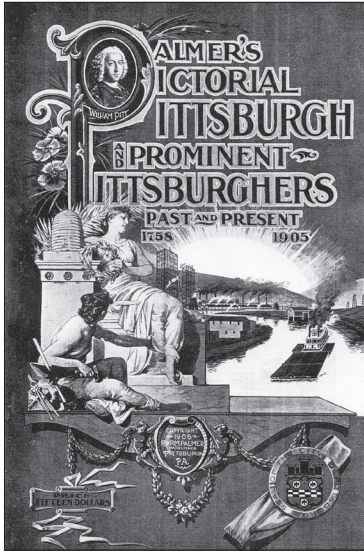
Shook received his art education at Horatio Stevenson's School in Pittsburgh, Yale University School of Fine Arts, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago School of Fine Arts. He moved to

Sewickley in 1930 and lived on Academy Avenue in a house called "20 Oaks." In addition to being an artist, he was a world traveler and author of mystery novels. In the early 1950s, he and his wife built a home reminiscent of "Fallingwater" at Muddy Creek Falls near Portersville, Lawrence County, PA. He died in 1983.

Willis D. Shook, III, M.D., the Art Institute founder's grandson, is a Pittsburgh plastic reconstructive and cosmetic surgeon. Jacquelyn Felix Fisher, a member of the faculty of the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, has, with E. W. Goodman, compiled photographs from historic archives, personal collections of alumni, faculty and staff for an Arcadia Publishing book entitled *The Art Institute of Pittsburgh*, which will be available in late November. Dr. Shook and Ms. Fisher will discuss Shook, his family, his Sewickley home and the founding of The Art Institute of Pittsburgh.

PLEASE NOTE TIME & LOCATION OF THIS PROGRAM!

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.



Some Recent Acquisitions

The Historical Society recently purchased a copy of *Palmer's Pictorial Pittsburgh and Prominent Pittsburghers Past and Present, 1758-1905*, edited and published by R. M. Palmer. This 166-page folio with index contains not only an illustrated history of Pittsburgh by Hartley M. Phelps of the *Pittsburgh Leader* but also 1268 portraits, numerous landscapes and city views and over 100 representations of town and country residences. Portraits of many individuals important to the history of the Sewickley Valley are included, as are several of their homes, most of which are no longer extant.

Another recent purchase is a CD of a three volume work, *Genealogical and Personal History of Western Pennsylvania*, John W. Jordan, editor-in-chief, published in New York by Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1915. The volumes contain genealogical and biographical data on many Western Pennsylvania families, including several from the Sewickley Valley, often tracking their descendants from Colonial times to the beginning of the 20th century.

The following article appeared in the January 1924 issue of *The Cardinal*, the journal of the Audubon Society of the Sewickley Valley. The article has been edited for length. Captain Anderson died October 6, 1928, at nearly 101 years old.

Passenger Pigeon Reminiscences

Following is the stenographic report of a conversation with Mr. John C. Anderson at his home in Sewickley on July 12, 1923. Mr. Anderson was born in 1828, and these boyhood recollections date from the early forties. His adventure as a forty-niner and his ensuing life on the river separate widely his earlier from his later years in Sewickley. Everyone knows how clear Mr. Anderson's memory is, and how vigorously he expresses himself. Indeed, he declares that he remembers many remote matters more certainly than things which lie nearer to the present. It would not be possible to find a better witness.

Do you remember, Mr. Anderson, that there were Wild Pigeons about here?

Yes, I remember when there used to be lots of them. There is something peculiar about them. When I was a boy there used to be lots of them in the woods. They were in the white-oak trees and ate the acorns; sometimes there would be so many get on the limb they would almost break it off.

I suppose lots of them were shot?

Yes, and squirrels too. We always would kill a few Pigeons when we went after squirrels. I never saw a Wild Pigeon's nest in my life.

How long would they stay in the fall?

They would stay in the fall until the weather commenced to get cold, but some would stay all the year round.

We went out after squirrels and hunted with old-fashioned smooth-bore guns. Before that it was flintlocks. I remember when we got the smooth-bore.

Did they come back in the spring?

Not so many, but there was quite a few stayed in the woods the year round. But along about the latter part of September or the first of

October, that's when they came. I don't know where they came from or where they went to. Some of them stayed the year round.

Did you ever see them flying in the valley?

Yes, in big herds many times.

What direction did they come from?

When they came, they came from the west possibly and went east, went sort of southeast.

The way the ducks and geese did?

Yes, the way the ducks and geese did. In the forties there would be many flocks of them on the white-oak trees loaded with acorns every year, and I saw them sometimes got out on the small limbs, so many of them that they broke the limbs.

They came mostly to white-oak trees?

Yes, white-oak trees. [Mr. Anderson pronounces white oak, whittuk, as was usual in earlier days.]

And chestnuts too?

Yes, and chestnuts too.

Did you see them mostly in the valley?

Mostly on the hills. They would fly lots of times across the valley to the tops of the hills there.

How large would you say those flocks were?

I would say some of them would have thousands of them in, or more.

They were pretty good eating?

Yes, they were right good.

Did they sell them in the market here?

I don't know.

Did you ever see a turkey in the woods here?

Oh, yes, I remember lots of turkeys, and deer too. There is some deer here now.

Where did you see the turkeys?

Why, I would see the turkeys — I was raised down there at Leetsdale, in an old brick house that belongs to Riter & Conley; that's where I was born and where I lived before I went to California.—I went up what is called the Camp-meeting Road. The land there belonged to the Shields estate and the Economites, and there is where we used to hunt for the squirrels and Pigeons. That's where the white oaks and chestnuts were. Very little timber had been cut out on it.

You found turkeys there too?

Yes, turkeys. After the weather would begin to

get snow on the ground we would find them in the corn fields.

You said that up on the hill above Leetsdale were the woods where you saw the turkeys? Was that where the Waggoner farm was?

Waggoner's farm was out beyond the intersection of the Backbone Road and the Camp-meeting Road.

That is, farther back than you found them?

Yes. The country farther back was more settled. The nearer hills were not. There used to be immense woods there. It wasn't half cleared out when I was a boy, and that is where the turkeys were.

Did you ever do any hunting along the river in the winter for ducks and geese?

Oh, yes. The river used to back up beyond our place in Leetsdale in the spring of the year. Not many wild geese, but any amount of ducks. Geese would light down there occasionally in the wheat fields. There used to be immense herds of them come up the river in the fall, and follow up the Monongahela, I suppose, and go south. I don't hear of many flying any more. They say there is a good many of them, but I haven't seen them for a while. I remember one time, that was about in the early forties, the wild geese—it was foggy, the river was high, and they couldn't get over Pittsburgh; they would light right down in the streets of Pittsburgh by the hundreds, attracted by the gas lights; lots of them were killed in Pittsburgh with clubs. They got bewildered and flew right down on the streets.

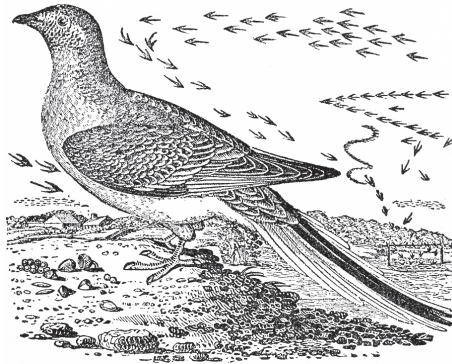
Do you remember whether hawks followed the flocks of Pigeons?

Yes, the hawks used to worry them a good deal. I think I saw the last living Pigeon. They had one in the park, in the Zoo in Cincinnati. I saw it, I suppose about ten years ago. It was said to be the only one then living. What be-

came of them?

Nobody knows. That is a curious thing, Mr. Anderson. We say civilization destroyed them, and of course it did. The Pigeons existed in tremendous numbers but they bred very slowly. They only laid one or two eggs to a pair. They didn't increase as rapidly as some other birds, and apparently there was a critical point there, and when their numbers were reduced beyond that point some other influence set in and destroyed them.

Yes, it is very curious what destroyed them.



Did the deer [keep to the ridges] or were they in the valleys?

The deer would stay up on the flat that I sold to Mr. Oliver, up there on the branch of Holey's Run. On one branch they used to have a creamery. Where the two branches came together, near Mrs. Rea's stables, that was a great place for deer. I would like to give you more information about the Pigeons, but I don't know where they came from and where they went to, the big herds, I mean. I know there were some of them stayed all the time, in the woods, and they evidently bred there.

After your return from California do you remember seeing Pigeons?

When I returned from California I went on the river. In the spring of '65 I went to the farm on the hill. I don't remember seeing Pigeons then. It's my idea that they disappeared about the time of the War.

Mr. Chambers Miller says that when he came to Sewickley, in 1852, Wild Pigeons were abundant. He remembers that in autumn when acorns were ripe they came in great flocks, flying up the river valley. Great numbers were shot. He recalls standing in a grove of locust trees which grew on the terrace above the railroad, west of Broad Street, and seeing great flocks pass within gunshot overhead. This was in 1852 or 3.

Captain David Shields came in 1854, while he was still a boy, to live in the valley, and from that time until 1860 he had a boy's acquaintance with the woods. He remembers that the Pigeons would come in great flocks, and that in the fall some would stop to feed, particularly on beech nuts. The boys did not go hunting for Pigeons particularly, but when out hunting would sometimes shoot them. Captain Shields remembers that they were particularly plentiful at Beech Spring, on the land now owned by Mr. Henry Buhl, Jr., on the Camp-meeting Road, and in Rich Hollow, which leads northward to Little Sewickley Creek a quarter of a mile above the Woodland Road bridge. The Pigeons for the most part kept to the tree-tops and afforded uncertain shots to small boys with small guns. Rarely, however, one would be found among the lower branches. Captain Shields does not remember seeing Pigeons after the Civil War, nor does he remember seeing their nests at any time.

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

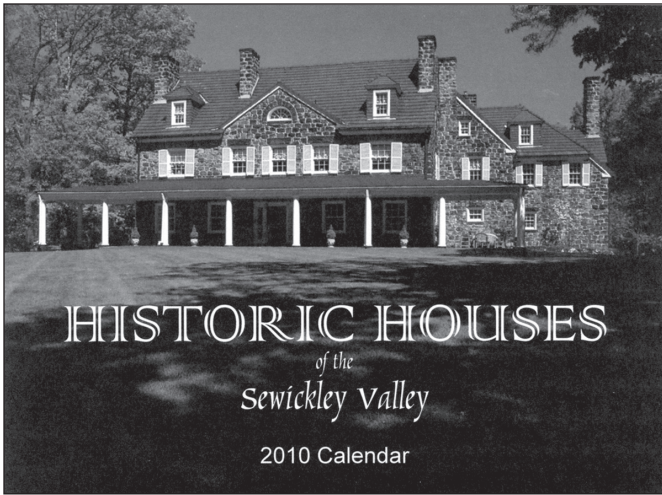
Mr. & Mrs. Harold Bonnett; Anne Murdock; Mary Louise Scholl

Donations

Top Notch Art Centre; Trowel and Error Garden Club; Village Garden Club

New Members

Craig & Jill Clark, Sewickley; Dottie Gariti Laird, Corona, CA; Bernadette J. Jatkowski, Sewickley; Beth & Jeff Shoener, Sewickley



2010 Historic Houses Calendar now available!

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 the Sewickley Valley Historical Society's second *Historic Houses of the Sewickley Valley Calendar*. This large format (12" x 9"), full color 2010 calendar, printed on heavy stock, is available for \$12, plus tax, at Historical Society Headquarters, Penguin Bookshop and Sweetwater's Holiday mART.

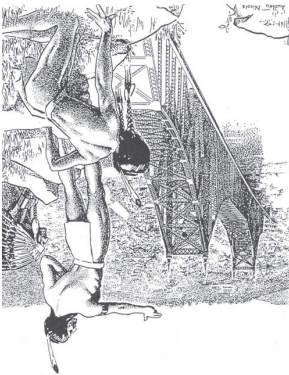
Calling All Quilts!



The Beaver County Historical Research and Landmarks Foundation (BCHRLF) has undertaken a project to document and publish the quilts of Southwestern Pennsylvania before this valuable piece of women's history is lost. Each quilt will be photographed and measured, and details about its history, ownership and design will be noted. Any type of hand-made quilt is welcome: patchwork, appliqué, embroidery, crazy quilts, whole cloth quilts, quilt tops that have never been completed as finished quilts. BCHRLF will have pattern and fabric dating resources available but will not appraise the quilts. Once completed, the intention is to submit the collected pictures and information to the Michigan Quilt Index, which is in partnership with The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, for inclusion in their nationwide database.

On Friday April 9, 2010, you can bring your quilt treasures to the Old Sewickley Post Office (Sewickley Valley Cultural Center) for inclusion in this project. There will be no fee for the documentation. DETAILS WILL FOLLOW!

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.



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