

Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

XXXV, Number 1

September 2007

The Sewickley Valley Historical Society's program year begins

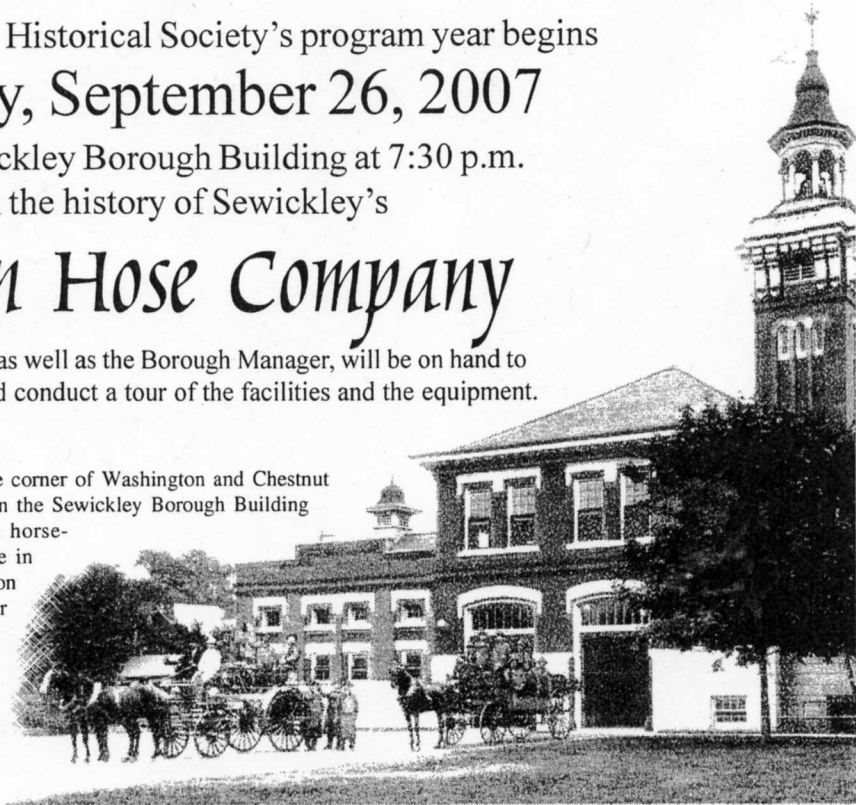
Wednesday, September 26, 2007

Meet at the Sewickley Borough Building at 7:30 p.m.
to learn the history of Sewickley's

Cochran Hose Company

Police and Fire Chiefs, as well as the Borough Manager, will be on hand to answer our questions and conduct a tour of the facilities and the equipment.

First located on Division St., then on the corner of Washington and Chestnut streets, Cochran Hose has been housed in the Sewickley Borough Building since it was erected in 1910. Modern horse-drawn equipment was bought after a fire in 1908 at the home of Mrs. Henry Robinson Rea. Because it took over a half-hour for the team of work horses drawing a hook-and-ladder and hose cart to get to her estate in Sewickley Heights, she realized that the town lacked adequate equipment and contributed \$1,325 for the best horse-drawn fire wagon available.



PROGRAM NOTE: The Historical Society program scheduled for Wednesday, October 24, 2007, at the Old Sewickley Post Office, has been changed. We are pleased to announce that John Ruch

from Harmony, PA, will present *A Visit to Iptingen*. Iptingen, a town in southwest Germany about 25 km. northwest of Stuttgart, was the birthplace of George Rapp, founder of the Harmony Society.

The Annual Sewickley Heights History Center

Riding & Driving Party

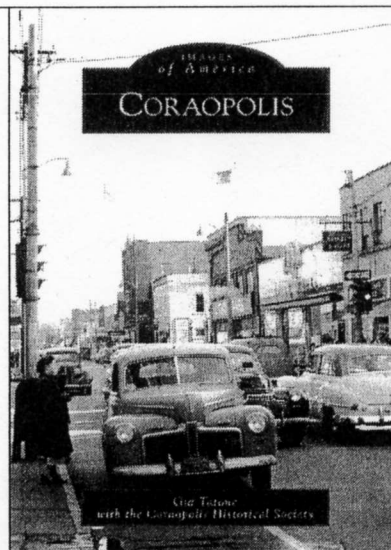
Saturday, September 29, 4:00 p.m.

Antique cars & carriages, an equestrian exhibition,
the Hunt, cocktails, dinner & dancing.

Special reduced donation for SVHS members: \$50 per person



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



New book on

Coraopolis

for sale at SVHS!

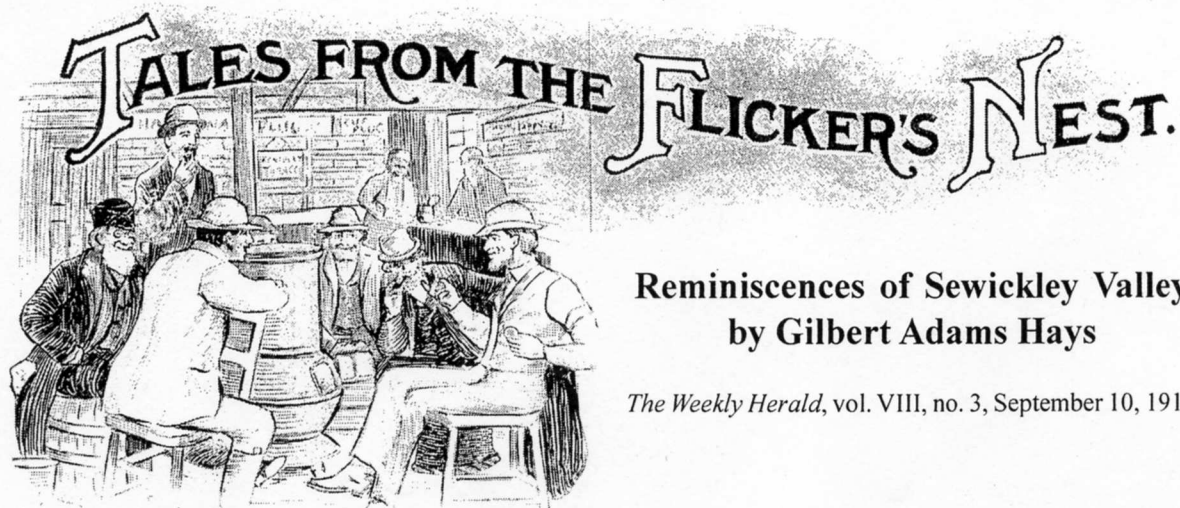
by Gia Tatone, with the
Coraopolis Historical Society

Arcadia Publishing's
Images of America Series
2007

200 vintage photographs
128 pages

\$21.39
(add \$5.00
for postage & handling)

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.



**Reminiscences of Sewickley Valley
by Gilbert Adams Hays**

The Weekly Herald, vol. VIII, no. 3, September 10, 1910

In the early days of Sewickley's history, the only means of extinguishing fires was by the primitive bucket brigade, and as wells and springs were scarce, cisterns were the principal source of water supply, and water being rather valuable, under the circumstances, a building, if it took fire, was generally allowed to burn down. This was the case with the old Travelli Academy, the Davis Homestead, the Edgeworth Seminary, and a number of residences of lesser value.

Following the completion of the water works in 1874, a movement was started toward securing a fire department, but as the Borough Council did not see fit to go to the necessary expense, Captain George W. Cochran, a man of rare public spirit and influence in the community, took it upon himself to secure the apparatus by popular subscription. Many citizens, principally mechanics and others of limited means, subscribed, some few with cash, others contributing labor and materials for the engine house, and in a short time a hose reel and hose was purchased, and with a great parade, headed by a brass band, the department showed off its equipment, bright in red paint and brass, with great pride. A volunteer company was organized at a public meeting held in Mozart Hall, on the evening of April 6, 1876...

Dissension in the ranks caused the company to practically disband in 1879, but on September 18 of that year, a reorganization was effected... At this meeting it was decided to limit the company to twenty members.

During 1879 the apparatus was presented to the Borough, having up to that time been independent.

On Memorial Day, 1880, the company took part in the parade of the G. A. R., the apparatus being handsomely decorated for the occasion.

The company headquarters was first located in a small building immediately adjoining the Borough Building on Division street, now the Reibert property, later removed to the miserable shack on the corner of Chestnut and Washington streets, that until 1910, served to shelter the apparatus.

The fire bell, purchased by Council, was received on June 2, 1881, and hung a few weeks later, remaining in use through all the changes of the company until to-day.

The first fire to which the company responded was the Merriman residence, up the Water Works road, but far from any fire plug and out of the Borough. Little could be done to save it, and it was totally destroyed. The Reibert fire on the ground now occupied by the site of the First National Bank, Broad street, before that

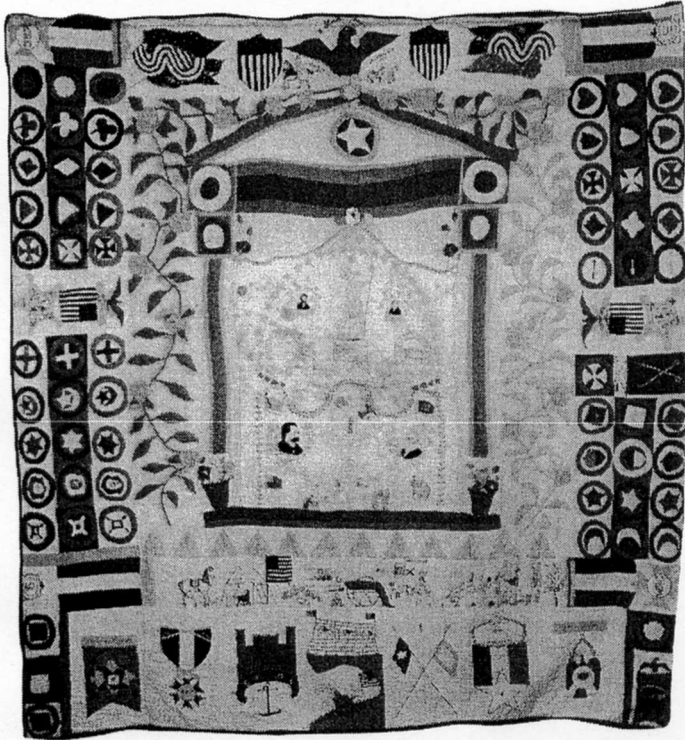
street had been opened above Beaver street, was the first opportunity the department had to try out their skill as fire fighters, and although the building was practically destroyed, the surrounding buildings, largely frame, were saved. Among the larger fires that followed were the boat yard at the foot of Ferry street, the Warden residence at Quaker Valley, the Van R. Smith residence on Graham street, Joseph Fleming's large stable, the old Little tavern on Beaver street, the two Bailey residences, and largest of all, the public school building. While the company, as a rule, did good work it was evident that they were handicapped by lack of apparatus and water pressure, and after some public agitation Council purchased two large chemical carts, two hose reels and one thousand feet of hose, the engine house having been enlarged to accommodate them. Shortly after this, by public subscription, a fine hook and ladder truck was added to the equipment, the Borough

making up a small deficiency in the fund. The department was subdivided into separate companies, each operating certain parts of the apparatus.



Sewickley Public School, destroyed by fire February 1, 1893. The first four rooms of the school were built in 1862, and eight more had been added by 1882. The school stood on the Thorn Street site of the "yellow brick school" designed by Elmer E. Miller in 1894 and razed in 1975.

Don't miss "Made in Pennsylvania" at The Westmoreland



If you haven't yet seen the outstanding exhibition *Made in Pennsylvania: A Folk Art Tradition* at The Westmoreland Museum of American Art, it's not too late. The show runs through **October 14, 2007**. On July 14, a group from the Historical Society traveled to Greensburg to view the exhibit of 389 artifacts—the largest and most in-depth showing of locally produced folk art in the region in five years—which includes the Sewickley Valley Historical Society's Civil War Quilt, pictured at left. Our quilt is even featured on the back cover of the exhibition catalog, which you can examine at Headquarters. The last time the quilt was shown was at a 2002 exhibition at the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center.

The quilt, cotton with embroidery and applique, is attributed to Sara Bright Anderson Lea and was stitched ca. 1890. In 1976, it was donated to the Sewickley Valley Bicentennial Committee, whose artifacts formed the foundation of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society's collection, by Sara Nearing, granddaughter of Sara Lea. The front of the quilt includes Civil War vignettes as well as Revolutionary War motifs. The embroidered words "mustered in 1861" and "mustered out 1865" refer to Union Army Private Benjamin Franklin Lea, who was born June 12, 1838, in Pittsburgh.

The Westmoreland Museum of American Art, located at 221 North Main Street, Greensburg, is open 11:00-5:00, Wednesday-Sunday and Thursday until 9:00. For more information, call the museum at 724-837-1500.

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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Mr. & Mrs. Helge H. Wehmeier
Malachy & Patty Whalen
R. Bruce Williamson

New Members

Kathy Bantleon, Sewickley; William L. Moore, Jr., Hollywood, CA

In Memoriam

The Sewickley Valley Historical Society mourns the loss of the following members:

Mrs. William H. (Betty) Colbert; Mrs. Josephine Simpson Houston; Mrs. J. Robert (Dorothy) Ferguson, Jr.;
Francis B. Nimick, Jr.; Mrs. Charles J. (Virginia) Ramsburg, Jr.

Ohio River Lighthouses

In 1880 there were 600 of them, located on the river banks between Pittsburgh and the Mississippi River. They were all numbered, commencing with No.1 at the Mississippi and on up to Pittsburgh. The lighthouse at Edgeworth was located on the northeast side of the Ohio, at the edge of the bank on a large sugar tree, approximately three feet in diameter, and situated about 50 yards west of what is now Edgeworth Lane. This tree was later washed away by high water, and a new lighthouse, consisting of post, steps and braces was built, having a hanger on top to place the lantern, which of course at that time was an oil burner. This lighthouse number was 594. The first light located west of Edgeworth was No. 593 on the bank at and on the Leetsdale side. The first one east was located at the west end of Neville Island.

To service those lights it was necessary to have tenders for them, appointed by the government, whose duties were to place a lighted lantern on a hanger at dusk every

day and remove it at dawn, excepting that on dark foggy days it would remain up. This Edgeworth light was in charge of George Gibb, Sr., he having been appointed in 1878 and in continuous charge up until 1928, making 50 years of service. At the time of the building of Dashields Dam across the center of Dead Mans Island, the lighthouse was removed as the dam served its purpose. A lighthouse tender received \$10 per month from the government, and where the lights were not far apart, and more than one could be served, he would get \$10 each.

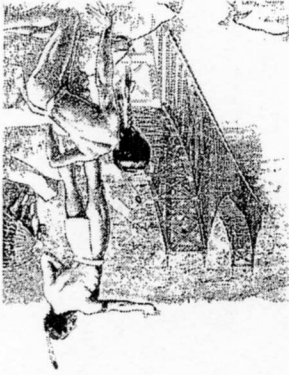
In 1880, the government owned service boats. The Tender 'Lily' furnished these lighthouses with oil. She would deliver the oil to them every three months and beforehand, the government would notify by letter all tenders to be at their respective lighthouses to receive their supply on the day set by the letter. The signal of approach of these service boats was one long and three short whistles, and it was absolutely necessary for someone to be there when the

boat called to receive the supply.

The Edgeworth light was one of the most important of all along the Ohio on account of the hazard of the sand bar at the head of Dead Mans Island. The bar extended for quite a distance up the river, which made it very necessary that this light be operated correctly at all times. Even after all these precautions were taken, many barges loaded with coal have been grounded on this bar and the coal bought for almost nothing from the owners.

At the time of the recent St. Patrick's Day Flood in 1936, many of the lighthouses had been installed with electric lights, run by storage batteries concealed in the ground below. The old style lantern proved very much superior and more reliable than the electricity, as most all of the storage batteries were short circuited and the lights out, while at the same time it was noticed that most all the lanterns were intact and still burning.

Signals is designed and edited by Susan C. Holton. Visit our website, www.sewickleyhistory.org — or e-mail us at sewickleyhistory@verizon.net.



September 2007

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