

Sewickley Valley Historical Society

Signals

XLII, Number 6

May 2015

Wednesday, May 20, 2015

7:30 p.m.

Old Sewickley Post Office

Citizen Hobo: *How a Century of Homelessness* *Shaped America*

A multi-media presentation by
Todd DePastino



Todd DePastino is founder and executive director of the Veterans Breakfast Club, a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to sharing veterans' stories with the public. Almost 3,000 different people have participated in the Veterans Breakfast Club's programs and activities over the past six years.

He is the author of the award winning *Bill Mauldin: A Life Up Front* (W. W. Norton, 2008) and five other books. He earned a Ph.D. in American History from Yale University and teaches at Waynesburg University, where in 2008 he won the Lucas-Hathaway Award for Teaching Excellence. He lives in Pittsburgh with his wife and two daughters.

Todd will present a multimedia program on the history of the American hobo, a talk based on his book *Citizen*

Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America (University of Chicago Press, 2003).

Almost every child of the Great Depression can remember hoboes, who were once a common sight on America's streets, roads and rails. Few, however, know the hobo's colorful history, which stretches back to the Civil War. Hobo subculture—what Todd calls “hobohemia”—was a world apart, with its own jargon, style and ethical code. World War II brought hobohemia to an end and set the stage for a new phenomenon we call “homelessness.”

Come learn the history of these rail riding wayfarers and hear Todd sing a verse or two of the hobo anthem, “Hallelujah, I'm a Bum!”

**The lecture will be preceded by a short Annual Meeting,
the election of officers and directors for 2015-16 and the presentation of the
2014 Architectural Preservation Award to Mr. & Mrs. Richard Flati.**

Refreshments will follow the presentation.

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.

An Early Sewickley Tale

The following story about a white man who had the temerity to try to settle during the American Revolution on Indian land on the north side of the Ohio River (in what would be called the Sewickley Valley), seemed like just one more frontier yarn until recent additions to our collection from Malcolm McKnight of Cambridge, MD, led us to realize that the author who recorded it, Charles McKnight, was a Sewickley resident. Charles McKnight's affection for the Valley and respect for authentic sources might make the story more plausible, even though the first settlers of record here—Leet, Way, Ulery and Beer—did not establish themselves until the late 1790s, after the pacification of the Indians by Gen. Anthony Wayne.

The author, Charles McKnight, Sr. (1826-1881), was the father of the rather more well-known Charles McKnight, Jr. (1865-1926), of Glen Osborne Borough. Born and raised in Sewickley, the son was a prominent businessman. He took a leading role in the organization of the First National Bank of Sewickley and the National Bank of Western Pennsylvania, was President of the Carbon Steel Company and the Western Coke Company and was a Director of Midland Steel Company and Westinghouse Air Brake Company. He was married to a local girl, Eliza Cochran Wilson (1860-1926), and they had three sons and two daughters. About 1895, the McKnights retained the architects Longfellow, Alden & Harlow to build their Tudor Revival house on Beaver Road in Glen Osborne, which still stands and is currently for sale. Sewickley Valley Historical Society is fortunate to have in its collection considerable documentation on this house, including correspondence, specifications, plans, and receipts for furnishings and services.

Charles McKnight, Sr., Princeton class of 1847, came to Sewickley in 1852. He was married to Jeannie Baird (1836-1897) and, like his son, had three sons and two daughters. Initially in the iron business, he was Proprietor and Editor of *The Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, which later became *The Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph*.

McKnight, Sr., owned property on Beaver Road at the foot of Pine Road and built a number of structures in the Valley. In 1866, he built an Italianate house on Pine Road, which still stands, using an innovative material, a special 12"x4"x4" hollow pressed brick manufactured by the Sewickley Brick Company, of which he was head. The company was located just below Shousetown (today's Glenwillard). These early concrete blocks, which looked like cut stone, were covered with a smooth stucco surface. From 1880 to 1890, this house was occupied by Annie McFadden Hays, widow of the Civil War general Alexander Hays.

McKnight was enamored of stories about the Pennsylvania frontier, which he serialized in magazines such as *The Illustrated People's Monthly* and later collected and published in book form, capitalizing on nostalgia for the "old days." His books were entitled *Captain Jack the Scout, or the Indian Wars, about Old Fort Duquesne: An Historical Novel with Copious Notes* (1873); *Simon Girty, "The White Savage": A Romance of the*

Border (1880); and *Our Western Border: Its Life, Forays, Scouts, Combats, Massacres, Red Chiefs, Adventures, Captivities, Pioneer Women, One Hundred Years Ago; Containing the Cream of All the Rare Old Border Chronicles (Now Long Out of Print and Almost Impossible to Procure), Together with a Large Amount of Fresh and Original Matter Derived from Authentic Sources, the Whole Work Embracing Strange and Thrilling Narratives of Captivities, Daring Deeds, Desperate Conflicts, Exciting Adventures, Personal Prowess, and Aiming, by Judicious Selections, to Present the Fullest, Most Varied and Most Reliable Portrayal of Border Struggle and Adventure Yet Published* (1876).

The story that follows, about a hunter, Albert Gray, an early squatter on the Sewickley shore, comes from the 1886 edition of *Our Western Border*, pages 435-437. A somewhat more detailed version of the adventure appeared in *Graham's Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. L, No. 1, January 1857, pages 129-132, entitled "The Knife and Tomahawk: An Unpublished Incident in the Life of Capt. Samuel Brady," by A Western Man. Was this Western Man Charles McKnight? This earlier version of the tale doesn't name Sewickley as the location of Gray's shack; rather, it describes the place as "the last piece of bottom land on the north side of the river, just below what is known as the Narrows." It dates the beginning of the story precisely to August 21, 1779.

Captain Sam Brady was a famous Indian fighter, driven by a consuming hatred of the red man. In 1778, his younger brother was killed by Indians, and in 1779 his father met the same fate. Brady



was born in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, in 1756 and died in Western Virginia in 1795. He was a soldier during the Revolution, participating in most of the early battles in the east. Later, Brady served as a scout under Colonel Daniel Brodhead in Western Pennsylvania and the Ohio territory, working out of Forts Pitt and McIntosh. His fame spread, and thrilling stories of his prowess were often told. Actual history and legend often merged on the western frontier. Brady is remembered in place names such as Brady's Bend

and East Brady on the Allegheny River above Pittsburgh; near Beaver, Pennsylvania, in Brady's Run, Brady's Path and Brady's Hill; and in Eastern Ohio for Brady's Leap and Brady's Lake.

The 1886 edition of *Our Western Border* and the *Graham's Illustrated Magazine* volume are available on line.

The story follows.

“**AT ANOTHER TIME**, about the close of the Revolution, Brady started with two tried companions—Thomas Bevington and Benjamin Biggs—from Fort McIntosh to Fort Pitt. They debated for some time which side of the Ohio they would take, but finally selected the northern, or Logstown shore, along which ran the beaten Indian trail. Moving rapidly forward they came to where Sewickley now stands, but where at that time was only the solitary cabin of a hunter named Albert Gray—one of that roving, daredevil, wild-turkey breed, that must be always a little in advance of outposts.

“Upon approaching this cabin, Brady suddenly came upon ‘Indian sign,’ and bidding his men crouch down, went ahead to reconnoiter. In a short time he heard a noise to one side, and beheld Gray himself coming along on horseback, with a deer laid across behind. Brady being dressed and painted, as usual, like an Indian, had to wait till the hunter was abreast, when he suddenly sprang forth and jerked Gray from his horse, saying hurriedly, as the other offered fierce resistance, ‘Don’t strike; I am Captain Brady! For God’s sake keep quiet!’ The twain now stealthily advanced, and to their horror saw the ruins of Gray’s little cabin smoking in the distance. It was as Brady feared. The savages had been at their hellish work. Gray’s feelings may be imagined. Unrecking of the danger, he madly rushed forward, rifle in hand, more cautiously followed by the ranger. The ruins were carefully examined, but finding no bodies, it was concluded that the whole family were made captive. Not an instant to be lost! The retreating trail was broad and fresh, denoting a large party of Indians. The two lurking scouts were now rejoined, and an eager, anxious conference followed. One advised to go to Fort Pitt and the other to Fort McIntosh, about equidistant, for aid, but Brady said, ‘Come! Follow me!’

“The pursuit was commenced at two P. M. Brady was a thorough woodsman, and knew the ‘lay’ of that country, with its ravines, points and short cuts, better than the redskins themselves. Sure, by the tread of the trail, that the marauders were making for Big Beaver ford, he so shaped his course to intercept, or, failing in that, to overtake them at this point. Right as a trivet; for on approaching the river he found their plain trail, making, as Brady supposed, for a wild, secluded glen through which a stream, now known as Brady’s Run, brawled its devious way.

“A close inspection and study of the traces indicated a party of at least a dozen. The odds were very large, but the anguish and impatience of the bereaved husband and father were so great that a sudden night attack was resolved upon. Secreting themselves, therefore, they patiently bided their time until dusk, when, crossing

the Beaver, they entered the savage and sequestered ravine on the other side, and soon descried—right beside a famous spring—the camp fire of the cruel kidnappers. The unrecking Indians were at their evening meal, the captives—among whom was a strange woman and two children beside Gray’s—sitting apart by themselves. The sight of his wife and children made Gray’s heart thump, and he was like a bloodhound held in leash. But Brady sternly rebuked his impatience, and firmly restrained him. Their only chance for success was to wait until the reds were asleep. If evil had been intended to the captives, it would have been inflicted before that. They must trust only to knife and tomahawk, and must all crawl to the side of the sleeping savages, each man selecting his victim.

“And now the fire has nearly died out, and the Indian camp is at rest. No watch dog there to betray the four scouts, who, making no more noise than their own shadows, draw themselves, like so many serpents, slowly but surely forward. A branch suddenly snaps beneath the knee of Biggs! Not much of a noise, but loud and distinct enough to cause one of the swarthy sons of the forest to spring to a sitting position, and—with head bent in direction of the alarm, and with ear intensely attent to the slightest sound—to listen, listen, listen. The four avengers lay prone on the grass, their hands on their knife handles and their hearts beating like muffled drums. The strain was truly dreadful, but perfect silence is maintained—no sound but the faint chirp of a wood cricket—so delicate that scarce would anything live between it and silence.

“The dusky statue, his suspicions at length lulled, gives the dying embers a stir, and, with a sleepy yawn, sinks again to slumber. He has thus lighted his own and his companions’ way to death, for when all was again quiet, a low cluck from Brady gives the signal of advance. Noiselessly as rattlers, each of the four drags himself alongside of a sleeping savage, a tomahawk in each right hand and a knife between the teeth. The four gleaming instruments of vengeance are now suspended above the unconscious sleepers, and at another low cluck from Brady, a hail of murderous blows descends.

“What a contrast now! The whole camp is a scene of the direst confusion and alarm. The remaining savages leap to their feet in a vain endeavor to escape the pursuing blades. Every one is sooner or later dispatched. The captives at first fled in alarm, but finding preservers at hand, soon returned and were restored to their friends. The spring by the side of which the Indians camped was afterwards, in memory of this swift retribution and dreadful tragedy, called the ‘Bloody Spring.’”

Report of the Nominating Committee

The members of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society Nominating Committee (James Darby, Chair; Donald Kipke; Nancy Merrill; Donald Traviss) propose the following slate of officers and directors for election to two-year terms at the SVHS Annual Meeting, Wednesday, May 20, 2015:

President: Michael Tomana (2nd term)

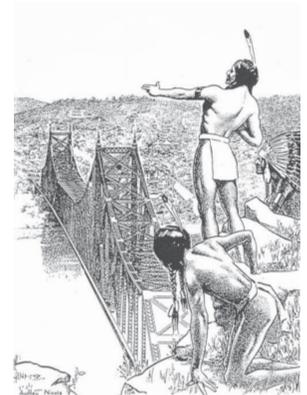
Vice President: Donald Traviss

Directors: Vince Delie, Douglas Florey, Thomas Hay, Daniel Telep (2nd term), Peter Theis

Sewickley Valley Historical Society
200 Broad Street
Sewickley, PA 15143

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May 2015



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This photo from about 1906 shows a train at the River Street crossing, with the Walnut Street crossing in the background, approaching the Sewickley Station at Broad Street. The photo was the gift of a long-time Sewickley Valley Historical Society member, Joseph Reiser, who died in 2006 at age 86. He was a retired Conrail conductor and Navy veteran, active in the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.



New Members

William I. Jack, Deborah Judkins,
Niles J. Laughner,
Mr. & Mrs. Brent Dennis Steinley

Friends, Sponsors, Patrons, Benefactors

Thanks to the following, who have supported SVHS with gifts in addition to membership dues:

William I. Jack, Deborah Judkins, Niles J. Laughner