

Sewickley Valley Historical Society *Signals*

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Wednesday, October 14th, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.
Old Sewickley Post Office



Pega and Frank Crimbchin

The Korean War as Seen through the Eyes of a Peasant

A Presentation by Katie Schell and Pega Crimbchin

Hear the extraordinary story of Ock Soon Lee (Pega Crimbchin) a Korean peasant, orphaned as a child, given over to another family to be little better than their slave, who was a young woman when war broke out on the Korean Peninsula and overwhelmed her home city of Seoul. Displaying courage and strength, she survived daunting challenges trying to escape communism, while hundreds around her died or were killed. Eventually

hope and love prevailed carrying her to a new life abroad as the wife of an American soldier, enabling her to become a U.S. citizen. Her daughter, Katie Schell, recorded her mother's experience in a book entitled *Love Beyond Measure: Memoirs of a Korean War Bride*. Katie will offer the narrative and her mother will give first hand color commentary with her beautiful Korean accent.

Newly Discovered Agnes L. Ellis Publication

Preeminent among printed recollections of life in the Sewickley Valley in the 19th century is the 308 page Lights and Shadows of Sewickley Life; Or, Memories of Sweet Valley by Agnes L. Ellis, published in 1893. Recently, the Atwood family presented to the Sewickley Valley Historical Society a seldom seen little booklet, a prelude to Ellis' final work Lights and Shadows, which was published three years earlier in 1890, entitled Memories of Sweet Valley; Or, Forty Years Ago and Now, for which Ellis used the pen name "Uncle Joe." Following are excerpts taken from the booklet:

I promised to give you some memories of the early days of our now thriving town. Most of them are personal memories. Some of them came to me through the words of long ago, uttered by the lips of those now done with our commonplace language, but the influence of whose beautiful lives still lingers with some who still inhabit this, to them, fairest and dearest spot on earth.

Sweet valley! Never fairer scene burst upon the vision of the traveler, than that upon which our eyes rested, as, after a long journey, which our quiet horses had made leisurely, we rested, in view of the lovely scene which was to be our future home.

Thirty houses dotted here and there for a distance of more than a mile (a number of which are still standing), and two small churches, a Methodist and Presbyterian, made up the town. From the lowliest toiler to the man of wealth, natives of America, Germany, Scotland, England and Ireland, they were a happy, industrious people. Aside from the mode of travel which we adopted, except when we were fortunate enough to catch a through-going stage, an occasional steamboat going up and down the Ohio river was our only means of reaching the adjacent cities and towns....

The house in which I write to-day is built in what the boys and girls in those days called "the woods," and while now the center, was at that time on the outskirts of the town. Two trees, within sight of my window, still stand as venerable patriarchs, rearing their stately heads and extending their arms as if in benediction.

What good times the boys and girls had then. All these so-called "woods" were common property. No one thought of interfering with them, as they roamed here and there in search of nuts or berries. As we grew old enough to enter into these excursions none were more enjoyed than an occasional trip to the hill back of town on which was a wonderful Indian cave, which some of the more venturesome explored. A sort of rude ladder was contrived, and, descending this to the depth of perhaps ten or twelve feet, a long narrow passage led to a place something like a gate-way, very narrow, called "the fat man's misery." It was quite an effort for some of us to get through it. I remember the boys from the village Academy were often seen with their long ropes and candles in hand going to the cave, which they were supposed to explore to a greater depth than anyone else, which fact made us think them very brave.

Our village was noted for two of the best schools within many miles of Pittsburgh, an Academy for boys and a Seminary for girls. Here were gathered representatives of many families, North, South, East, and West. Many of the leading business men of Pittsburgh and vicinity were educated in the old Academy, and homes far and near are cheered and blessed by the wives and mothers, who, along with a knowledge of mathematics, English Literature, Music, Painting, &c., learned many beautiful lessons of

love and good will in the quiet Seminary nestled among the maple trees....

The village boasted very few stores at that time, but I fancy I see each store-keeper and the general arrangement of the stores. One of these, kept by an old lady who supplied the boys and girls with cakes, candy, and nuts was always well patronized. What devices the boys resorted to in order to get an extra trip in the neighborhood of this wonderful store. A sudden misstep, by the help of friendly weapon, dislodged the heel of a shoe which must needs be repaired. A spring over a fence, in the neighborhood of a nail, caused a rent that must be at once taken to the tailor in accordance with the maxim, "A stitch in time saves nine."

The services in our little church, were held in the summer evenings before dark, when in those primitive times some of the ladies came, occasionally, with the nice calico dress and nicely ironed sun-bonnet (ladies of means, too), and occasionally a man sauntered in, in the warm evenings, minus his coat and looking deliciously comfortable in vest and shirt sleeves. We usually lingered for a chat under a large walnut tree, before going into the church. One evening a young man, who had been in the neighborhood for a little time, and by some means had become intoxicated, strolled into the church yard. Quite a number of persons were gathered under the shade of the old forest tree, and among them my friend Samuel, who, with his usual zeal, which sometimes was without knowledge, took him into the church.

We were a little flock, but we had an earnest young minister, who labored there for many years, and such voices to lead our singing as one fancies the angels have.

While most of them have joined the glorious choir in the "New Jerusalem," there are at least two of them still in our midst. On this particular evening the words of the opening hymn rose clear and sweet, and were indelibly stamped on the minds of some of the youthful worshippers. After the first few words had been sung the young man afore-mentioned arose to his feet, and, clapping his hands, said, in loud, ringing tones, "Bravo! first-rate singing! I've traveled the country all over, and I never heard better singing!" In spite of the worthy minister's stern, "Be quiet, sir!" he kept up his applause, until, at last, the village doctor persuaded him to go out....

Our village, for a number of years, did not boast of a post-office. A mile and a half below the town a wealthy gentleman, in a room of his fine residence (which, after the lapse of so many years, stands, in it slightly remodeled condition, a fair comparison with modern dwellings) had a post-office for the accommodation of his friends and the surrounding neighborhood. In this way we received the letter that came in those days, before the cheap postal system was introduced, like "angels' visits, few and far between." The one

or two persons who went to the post office during the day brought the mail for the neighbors....

What a proud people we were when we had a post office of our own, kept in a corner of the grocery store by a teacher of the old Academy. From place to place it has been removed, according to our needs, until now it ranks as a Presidential office, requiring a number of clerks to distribute the huge budget of mail matter that comes to us many times a day....

Some of the finest apple orchards you ever saw were to be found in our neighborhood. What a time we boys and girls had gathering apples, and how we enjoyed seeing the rich juice, as it was squeezed through an immense press kept in the orchard, near the village inn, and helping to pare the apples and stir the immense kettles of apple-butter which every family annually made. There were no apple parers in those days, and it was considered quite a feat to get the skin of an apple off without a break, with our knife, then throw it over our right shoulder and look to see in the form of what letter it fell; said letter was the beginning of our sweetheart's name....

In these days of quick travel you can hardly realize what our town was like in the days of long ago. Drove of cattle, sheep and horses passed up our main street almost daily, and, would you believe it, sometimes a large drove of turkeys being taken in that way from one city to another.

Speaking of turkeys reminds us of a true story about a boy who lived on a farm about a mile back of the town. The father and mother of the hopeful youth were regular church-goers, and one morning just as they were starting to church a lot of turkeys, of which the house-wife was very proud, were making for a field of vegetables and the father called out to the boy to drive them away, saying, "Tommy, take the heads of them turkeys," Imagine their consternation when, on returning, they found he had literally taken off every turkey's head but one. At midnight the good people commenced their Monday's work and prepared the whole flock of turkeys for market; then as soon as the work was done they took a journey of fourteen miles in a wagon to market. This fond mother's ambition was to see her son as a minister, but as he left our town in his boyhood we cannot say whether he kept on literally obeying his parents or not....

Our beautiful cemetery on a hill overlooking the town was not thought of then. A little plot of ground back of the Presbyterian church and a larger one used by the Methodist brethren (although free to all, as it was given for the purpose when the town was laid out), both near enough to be easily reached on foot took its place. In those days every one walked to funerals, two by two. Usually all the children about the place joined the company. Fine residences occupy the site of both of these sacred spots, which were the usual resorts on Sunday afternoons for old and young. We often took our Sunday-school books and read under the shade of the fine old trees....

Time sped on; new houses had sprung up in many parts of our town; many more families had come to settle here, and new faces were seen on our streets. What a feeling of prosperity and security there was. How proudly fathers and mothers looked upon the children in their homes, and with that a fond hope for the future did they think of the sons and daughters grown to manhood. When the civil war broke out it seemed hardly possible that any of "our

boys" would be called to go, but, as the cloud grew blacker and the conflict waged fiercer, a company was organized and the boys began drilling. One of our new churches, which was just roofed and floored, was used for this purpose, and night after night parents and sisters, sweethearts and friends gathered in as spectators. At last the day of departure came, a day never to be forgotten, and, amid forced smiles and many tears, words of cheer and sad forebodings, the little band left home and friends.

A little band of girls, under the leadership of one of the best and noblest of women, the fragrance of whose holy life still lingers, while we sadly miss the kind words and bright smiles, since the Master called her "up higher," gathered in the little Presbyterian church week after week to sew flannel shirts for the boys (a sad pleasure), and, as they strove to cheer each other in their work, many a heart-sick, longing sigh and anxious thought were given to those who were risking their lives under the "starry banner." Fever claimed one of the fairest for its victim. Another was taken prisoner, and the last dreadful news came that three of them had fallen in one battle. Can we ever forget the day when these three were brought home and laid in our new cemetery? all the people from the village and surrounding country turning out to honor those who had been so brave. When our prisoner returned from Libby we all went to the completed new church to hear his experience of prison life.

I remember he began his lecture by saying, "In the first place, I was not asleep,"—as it has been reported that being overcome with fatigue and want of rest he had fallen asleep by the wayside, and thus been captured. Certainly no one slept during that lecture, and those who for many years read his editorials in the Pittsburgh paper, which he so ably conducted, knew him as a very wide-awake man, with more than an ordinary amount of intellect.

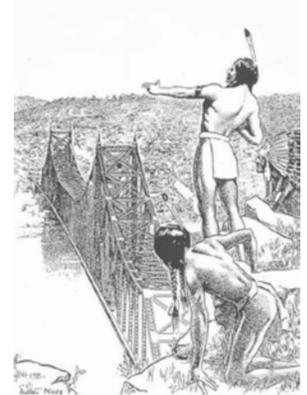
I did not tell you of the excitement attending the making of the railroad, and of the effect upon those who had never seen such a thing the sight of the first train of cars had. You can imagine all this, also the growth of the town as a result of this mode of travel.

Many families moved here, the heads of which connected with the business houses in the adjacent city. Ministers, judges, doctors, lawyers and editors are here in great numbers. Our main street, on pleasant evenings, reminds one of a fashionable watering place, from the number of phaetons, carriages, carts and drags that pass up and down.

We have an opera house, too, and home as well as foreign talent entertains the people in their thirst for pleasure by concerts, theatricals, etc., some of the good people who once frowned down a dance and thought it a sin to wear a bow of ribbon on their bonnets, being seen within its walls in holiday attire. Instead of taking a walk on a Sunday afternoon, as in the old times, to the graveyard, scores of young people may be seen wending their way to a park near our city waterworks for a promenade....

An occasional game of ball was indulged in by our boys in earlier times, but now we have games of tennis in our athletic ground every day, almost, during the summer, between the young men and maidens, and baseball games are of frequent occurrence. Our old-fashioned parties and social afternoon visits have given place to euchre parties and afternoon teas, and, altogether, the absent residents of forty years ago, could they return, would hardly recognize the place.

October 2015



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