

# Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

XXXV, Number 5

March 2008



Solomon Spalding, 1795

Wednesday, March 26  
7:30 p.m.

Old Sewickley Post Office

## *The Spalding Enigma: Sewickley Connections to the Early History of Mormonism*

An illustrated lecture by Arthur Vanick

In *The Weekly [Sewickley] Herald* of November 23, 1912, is an article entitled "The Origin of the 'Book of Mormon.'" The article begins:

The following extremely interesting narrative relating to the origin of the first "Book of Mormon" was related by Judge W. A. Way as a prelude to the lecture given on "The Modern Mormon Kingdom," by the Hon. Frank J. Cannon, under the auspices of the Home and School Association on Thursday evening last week ...

Judge Way goes on to say:

The subject of Mormonism has an especial interest for a Sewickley audience. Few, probably, of those here tonight know that the origin of ... "The Book of Mormon" is intimately associated with the history of a family that has resided in this vicinity for two generations ...

The story in *The Weekly Herald*, as told by Judge Way, comprises a mystery as fascinating today as it was in 1912. It involves Solomon Spalding, an ex-clergyman who wrote a novel entitled *A Manuscript Found*, the Patterson family of Edgeworth and Glen Osborne, a renegade Baptist preacher named Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism.

Join us as Arthur Vanick delivers an illustrated lecture unraveling the threads of this mystery. Co-author with Wayne L. Cowdrey and Howard A. Davis of the 2005 book published by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, entitled *Who Really Wrote The Book of Mormon: The Spalding Enigma*, Mr. Vanick is a computer graphics expert who worked in the highly classified special projects division of a major U. S. government aerospace contractor. He is a resident of Manhattan Beach, CA, and is owner and operator of a video and voice-over production studio. He has lectured widely on *The Spalding Enigma*, most recently before the annual meeting of the Ex-Mormon Association in Salt Lake City, where he was well-received.

### NOTE THE DATE CHANGE

**THE SVHS BUS TOUR TO THE WASHINGTON COUNTY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HAGERSTOWN, MD**  
is scheduled for **SATURDAY, MAY 3, 2008.**

See page 3 of this newsletter for details.

*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.

## Volume on Harmonist Furniture to Be Published in 2008

Pieces of furniture speak clearly to a broad audience. As a result, they are one of a historic site's most effective interpretive tools. While specific pieces of furniture may have their own intrinsic interest, they can also offer a broader context for the interpretation of the site, and in that role they can help synthesize various historical factors that influenced and shaped the site.

The Old Economy Village Museum in Ambridge has a large collection of Harmonist furniture. In fact, such furniture found outside the Old Economy Village Museum is quite rare and difficult to identify, and furniture attributed to the Harmonist Society often has no provenance. In the Fall of 2008, the Friends of Old Economy Village, a non-profit support group for Old Economy Village, will publish a book entitled *The Material Culture of the Harmony Society: Volume 1, Furniture*, by Philip Zimmerman. You may remember that Dr. Zimmerman delivered an illustrated lecture on the book at the Sewickley Valley Historical Society's annual meeting at Old Economy last May. It is hoped that this volume will enable collectors to identify and preserve Harmonist furniture through design and construction details.

The Book Committee has received funding from the Richard C. von Hess Foundation and the Gookin Family Foundation. Members of the committee are: John Kroeck, Chairman, Joe Zemba, Walter Brumm; Advisory Board: Ann Genter, Harley Trice, Bob Clendennen; Curatorial Staff: Sarah Buffington, Eric Castle.

Records of the Harmony Society indicate that relatively few pieces of furniture were sold to the outside world; furniture was made for internal use, only. One may speculate that significant amounts of furniture did leave the Society when approximately one-third of the members left as dissenters in the schism of 1832. Records of items removed were not kept. One may also speculate that some furniture was left behind when the Society vacated earlier settlements in Harmony, Pennsylvania, and New Harmony, Indiana. The extensive records left by the Society do not include records of furniture produced or furniture inventories. Since property ownership was communal and there were no children to inherit estates (members were celibate), estate inventories were considered unnecessary. Estates were not probated.

Old Economy's **SPRING GARDEN WORKSHOP: GARDENS OF PENNSYLVANIA** will be held on **Saturday, April 12, 2008**. Spend the day discovering the history and beauty of the most famous gardens of Pennsylvania. For further information, please contact Old Economy Village, 270 Sixteenth Street, Ambridge, PA 15003, (724) 266-4500, [www.oldeconomyvillage.org](http://www.oldeconomyvillage.org).

The photo below illustrates a pair of chairs that left the Harmony Society before 1840 and descended through two local families associated with Old Economy. Both chairs share design characteristics that relate to other chairs in the museum collection at Old Economy Village. Note the shape of the seat, the diamond shaped chair stretcher, the distinctive arrow-back shape of the stiles and the roll back chair splat.

The taller chair with lyre stenciled decoration was purchased at the estate auction of Edgeworth's famous river boat captain, Frederick Way, Jr. (1901-1992). The collector who purchased the chair recognized its Harmonist design and was aware of a relationship between Captain Way's family and the Harmony Society.



Caleb and Rebecca Mendenhall Way purchased a tract of Depreciation land in 1785 titled "Way's Desire," which was located in present-day Edgeworth. Their grandson, Abishai Way, a Quaker storekeeper, was an important conduit of trade goods from Philadelphia to the Harmonist Stores. The Harmonists sold or bartered these trade goods for hides, grain and wool, which were used in their manufacturing of shoes, whisky and woolen goods. Abishai Way had contracted for the building of a new home along the Beaver Road on the Edgeworth land

when he died prematurely in 1836 at age 44. His widow and six children lived with the Harmonists from 1837 until 1840, when the Edgeworth house was completed. It is theorized that the Harmonist lyre back chair was brought to Edgeworth by the widow and descended through the family to Captain Way.

The shorter chair descended through the Schafer/Brown/Otto family in Monaca. The underside of the chair is stamped "JS" for Jacob Schafer, born in 1801, who arrived at the Harmony Society in 1807. Schafer was a dissenter who left the Society in 1832 and moved to Phillipsburg (now Monaca) under the leadership of a religious prophet named Count de Leon. Jacob Schafer managed the German Woolen Mill at Monaca and married the daughter of a river boat captain named Brown.

— John Kroeck

## Bus Tour to the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Hagerstown, MD



**O**n Saturday, May 3, a bus will depart from Sewickley Valley Historical Society Headquarters, 200 Broad Street, at 8:00 a.m. for the approximately 3½ hour journey to the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts in Hagerstown, MD. Museum admission is free, and lunch will be included in the cost of the trip. The bus will return to Sewickley by about 6:00 p.m. The cost will be between \$35 and \$50 per person, depending on numbers. **PLEASE LET US KNOW AT 412-741-5315 IF YOU PLAN TO ATTEND, SO THAT WE CAN FINALIZE PLANS.**

The museum, which opened its doors in 1931, was founded by Hagerstown native Anna Brugh Singer and her husband, landscape painter William H. Singer, Jr. (shown at left). As stated in last month's *Signals*, William Singer lived for part of his life in Edgeworth, and his home and studio survive today. The Washington County Museum is a major repository of his work and houses a collection of over 6,000 objects, with a focus on American art.

During our May 3 visit, we will be able to view a special exhibition entitled "The Horses Are Coming." Bringing together nineteenth and early twentieth century paintings, sculpture and graphic art on loan from distinguished collectors and from the museum's permanent collection, the exhibition will depict horses throughout history and from across the world — as workers, elite athletes, fierce battlefield companions and fascinating entertainers. Acclaimed equestrian artists will include Frederick Remington, Anna Hyatt Huntington and the French sculptor Antoine Louis Barye.



**T**his photo shows a kindergarten class from the Sewickley Public School on a visit to Franklin Farm in the early 1940s. Designed in 1899 as the summer home of B. F. Jones, Sr., Franklin Farm was razed in the 1960s. Like many of the other great estates that once stood on Sewickley Heights, it was a working farm. Note the student receiving instruction on milking a cow.

The photographer was Thomas J. Toia (1907-1959), a Sewickley native, photographer for the *Sun-Telegraph* and a Sewickley policeman. The photo was first published in the Spring 2005 issue of *News and Views from Sewickley*, a newsletter compiled for Sewickley High School alumni by Mary Jane Williams.

### In Memoriam

John K. Orndorff, Sr.

### Sponsors, Patrons, Benefactors

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

Susan & Philip Jones; Rob & Tina Thomas

### New Members

Peter & Ulla Bak, Sewickley Hills; Ross Rogers, Jr., Sewickley

# Third Annual "Celebrate Sewickley!"



This year's **CELEBRATE SEWICKLEY!** poster, from an oil painting by Joyce Werwie Perry, will be for sale for \$10 at Sweetwater in early April. It shows a view of Broad Street, with Sewickley's "town clock" in the steeple of the Sewickley United Methodist Church in the distance.

**S**weetwater Center for the Arts, Sewickley Valley Historical Society and the Old Sewickley Post Office Corporation have joined forces again this year to **CELEBRATE SEWICKLEY!** This annual celebration of the Sewickley Valley and the artists who reside and work here will take place from April 11-26. Funds raised will be used for the maintenance of the Sewickley Valley Cultural Center (the old Sewickley Post Office), home to the three organizations.

The opening reception of the **CELEBRATE SEWICKLEY!** art exhibition is scheduled for Friday, April 11, 5:30-8:30 p.m., in conjunction with the Spring Gallery Walk. Hors d'oeuvres and refreshments will be served at the Sewickley Valley Cultural Center Community Room.

**On Sunday, April 13, at 2:00 p.m., Sewickley Valley Historical Society President Joe Zemba will present a slide lecture entitled "The Village of Sewickley: A Historical Overview" at the Sewickley Public Library. His talk will detail the rich and colorful history of the community using documents as well as vintage and contemporary images. Learn how Sewickley was founded and has progressed over the last 250 years, as it has changed from the edge of the American frontier into the lovely village we know today. The lecture is FREE and is open to the public.**

Finally, on Saturday, April 26, from 5:00-8:00 p.m., there will be an art sale and silent auction of selected works from the **CELEBRATE SEWICKLEY!** exhibition in the Community Room of the Sewickley Valley Cultural Center. Delicious food, drinks and live music will top off the festive evening. The cost is \$35 per person.

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*Signals* is designed and edited by Susan C. Holton. Visit our website, [www.sewickleyhistory.org](http://www.sewickleyhistory.org) — or e-mail us at [sewickleyhistory@verizon.net](mailto:sewickleyhistory@verizon.net).

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**March 2008**

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