

Sewickley Valley Historical Society *Signals*

XXXVII, Number 5

March 2010

Saturday, March 20, 2010

A Docent-Guided Tour of the

Depreciation Lands Museum

Meet at the Old Sewickley Post Office, 200 Broad Street, at 10:30 a.m. to carpool to the museum, 4743 South Pioneer Road, Allison Park, PA 15105. The tour is scheduled for 11:00 a.m.

After the tour, we plan to have a Dutch-treat lunch at Max & Erma's, which is near the museum.

Please let us know at 412-741-5315 if you plan to attend, whether you will stay for lunch and if you will be able to transport others (how many?) in your car.

WE NEED RESERVATIONS BY TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2010.

Created by Hampton Township in 1973, the Depreciation Lands Museum seeks to preserve and interpret the early years of European settlement in the Depreciation Lands.

The Museum's peaceful wooded grounds transport the visitor into an earlier time, with costumed demonstrators every Sunday afternoon during the season, April-November, and special group activities for school, scout and adult groups. The site includes the Pine Creek Covenant Church (1837) and the associated cemetery, the Armstrong log house (1803), an herb garden, a replica school, circa 1885, a working blacksmith shop, a wagon house that houses a Conestoga wagon and displays, and a meeting building.



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.

The Depreciation Lands

This article first appeared in the Sewickley Herald, July 10, 2008.

You may have noticed that the Sewickley Valley Historical Society has recently installed blue and yellow signs in a number of Sewickley Valley boroughs to show the location of a north-south line that runs through our lives. This was the first mark placed upon these lands by the Europeans, two hundred and twenty-five years ago in 1785. Here is the story.

Despite its location on a flat plain right on the Ohio River, the Sewickley area was not settled until after the Revolution. There were several reasons for this. Lands south of the Ohio River and to the east of Pittsburgh were more accessible and fertile and settled first. Also, both Pennsylvania and Virginia disputed the ownership of these western lands. Only in 1779 did negotiations lead to Virginia's relinquishing her claim. Most importantly, the Indians retained ownership of the land west of the Allegheny River and north of the Ohio River, and settlement by Europeans was forbidden.

The Six Nations (the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Senecas, Cayugas and Tuscaroras) exercised control over the area, but it was mostly uninhabited and used for hunting by various tribes, some of them refugees forced westward by inexorable European pressure. There was an Indian village north of today's Ambridge called Logstown that had some fifty cabins, inhabited by Mohawks, Senecas, Oneidas, Delawares, Shawnees and Wyandots. Both English and French traders came there to do business. The French who sought to develop the Ohio River corridor as a link between their settlements in the Great Lakes and the Mississippi were forced out by the English and compelled to cede Canada in the French and Indian War (1756-1763); the Eng-

lish were themselves defeated by the Americans in the American Revolution (1776-1783). But, all the while, the Indian lands to the north of the Ohio River remained inviolate.

During the Revolutionary War, the soldiers of the Continental Army were paid by the Continental Congress with paper money known as Continental Currency. In the beginning this money was backed by gold, but as the war continued more and more paper money was printed with no gold to back it, and this caused the money to depreciate in value. By the end of the war, Continental Currency was virtually worthless, which gave rise to the expression "Not worth a Continental." The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania had to do something to help her poorly paid soldiers, and Certificates of Depreciation were issued that could be used for the purchase of land. An Act of the Pennsylvania Legislature passed March 12, 1783, provided for the purchase of the lands still owned by the Indians in western Pennsylvania and their sale or donation to veterans.

Treaties signed at Fort Stanwix, New York, on October 23, 1784, with the Six Nations and at Fort McIntosh in Beaver, Pennsylvania, in January 1785, with the Wyandots and Delawares, extinguished the Indians' claims to the lands north and west of the Allegheny and Ohio Rivers. The amounts paid to the Indians were \$5000 and \$3000 respectively. There was the fear, later proved justified, that not all Indians would welcome an influx of settlers. Nevertheless, the huge tract of newly purchased land was divided into two great sections by a due east-and-west line running from Mahoning Creek, near Kitanning on the Allegheny River, to the western border of the state, and

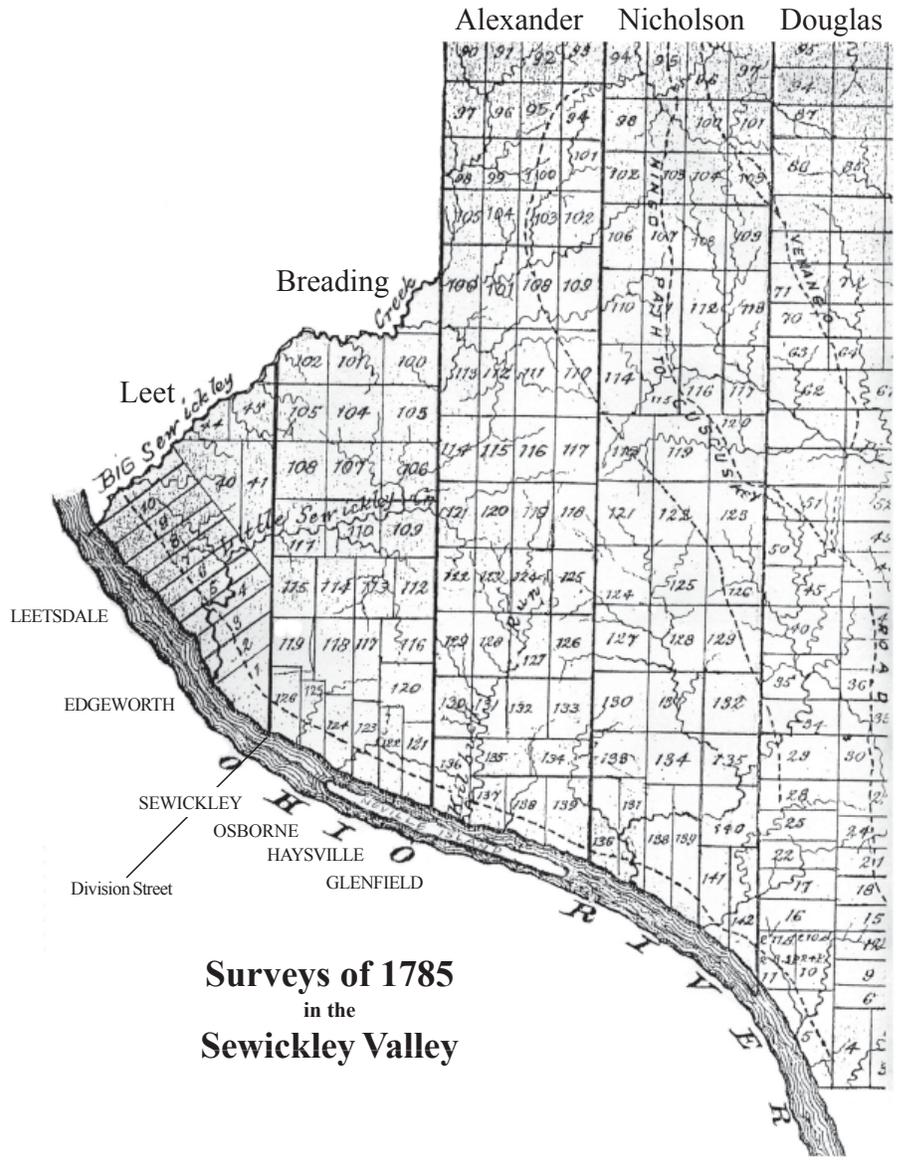
surveying commenced. The land north of this line was known as "Donation Lands" and was given to officers and soldiers according to their rank and service. The land south of the line was appropriated to the redemption of depreciation certificates, and these allotments were called "Depreciation Lands."

The Depreciation Lands were divided into five districts from west to east, and surveyors were appointed for each district to lay out the land in lots of 200 to 350 acres. The Sewickley Valley, bordered by Big Sewickley Creek to the west and Kilbuck Run to the east (today's Glenfield), fell within part of District 2, surveyed by Major Daniel Leet, and a portion of District 3, surveyed by Nathaniel Breeding (sometimes spelled Braden). The north-south dividing line between Leet's and Breeding's Districts, stretching some thirty miles north, became Division Street, where that line runs diagonally through the town of Sewickley. The reason Division Street is on a diagonal in relation to the other streets in the town is that the town was laid out parallel to the river, which flows to the northeast in this area. The presence of this diagonal makes many of the blocks near it in the town irregular in shape, creating a street plan that looks more like a jigsaw puzzle than a grid.

When these surveys were completed in the summer of 1785, the sale of the land commenced at the Old Coffee House in Philadelphia. Sales did not go well, because most of the soldiers came from the eastern part of the state and did not want to move out to what was still wilderness. Also, the area was infested with marauding Indians who would not be subdued until General Anthony Wayne defeated them at Maumee, Ohio, August 20, 1794, at the

battle of Fallen Timbers, and the treaty signed at Greenville ended all Indian resistance in the old northwest.

So most of the land did not, in fact, go to deserving veterans. Many soldiers, hoping to make a quick profit, sold their depreciation certificates to speculators. There are many examples of manipulation. In 1785, Mark Willcox, a wealthy mill owner and judge from Delaware County, paid £2,975 in depreciation certificates for 28 tracts of land totaling 6,302 acres in Leet's District. These were only a few of his many land purchases in the area. Then there was Thomas McKean, who had signed the Declaration of Independence, served in the Continental Congress, was Chief Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and later Governor of the state. He ended up owning 17 tracts in Leet's district, 10 tracts in Breading's district, four in Alexander's district and one in Cunningham's district. Some of these lands were up in the hills far from the river, but others were prime real estate. The surveyors themselves were not supposed to use their inside information for advantage, but they did. Major Daniel Leet obtained extensive and valuable land in Sewickley Bottom in the district he had surveyed, ultimately gaining possession of lots 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. The lots held by him were known as Newburg, Norwich, Newington, Lincoln, Locust Bottom, Sugar Bottom and Leetsburg. This included all of the western part of what is today Edgeworth and Leetsdale, and some of this land remains in the possession of his family to this day.



Our town and our valley are arranged as they are today because of those surveys made more than 200 years ago. The surveyors' lines are there, invisible beneath our feet. Some of the original stones marking the sections can still be

found. The borders of our Boroughs and Townships are all Depreciation lines. The surveyors of 1785 would be amazed that their marks still order and define our lives.

Donations

Dorothy R. Arwe; Mrs. Richard Frey; Ms. Rose Collinger-Sabatasse, in memory of Mrs. D. B. Oliver, II;
Mr. & Mrs. Arthur S. Waters, Jr., in memory of Gloria Kerchner

New Members

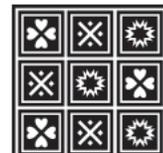
Michael Kaye, Leetsdale

Report of the Nominating Committee

The Sewickley Valley Historical Society Nominating Committee (Nancy Baldwin, Gloria Berry, Steven Davis, Jane Hitchins, Cordelia Jacobs) proposes the following slate of officers and directors for election at the Annual Meeting, May 19, 2010:

Secretary: Elizabeth Stein
Treasurer: Margie Gilfillan
Directors: James Darby, Peter Floyd, Michael Murphy, Ross Rogers, Peter Sour

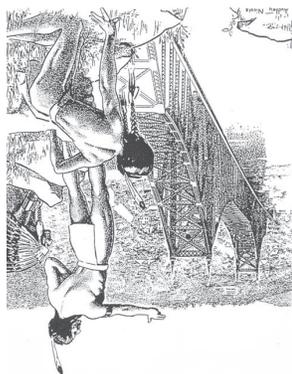
Calling All Quilts!



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. Call the Historical Society at 412-741-5315 to register.

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.



March 2010

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200 Broad Street
Sewickley, PA 15143