

Sewickley Valley Historical Society *Signals*

XXXIII, Number 3

November 2005

Please note the **CHANGE OF VENUE** for the Historical Society's
Tuesday, November 29, 2005, meeting:

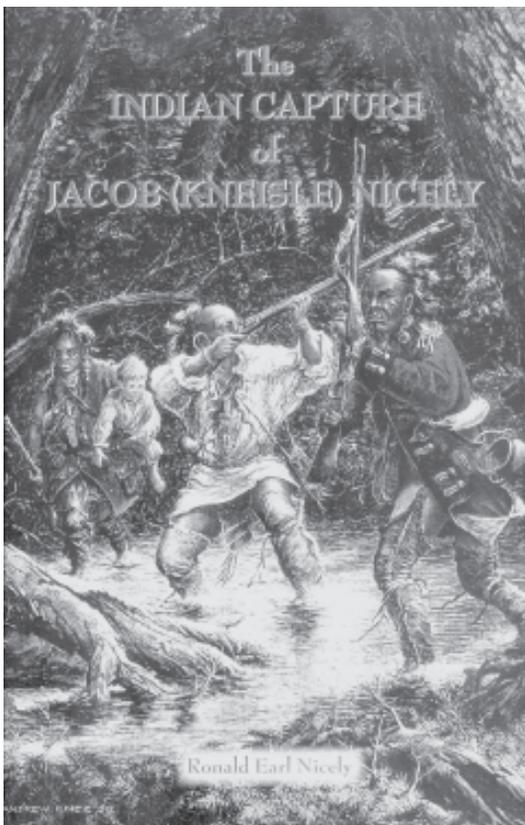
The Indian Capture of Jacob (Kneisle) Nicely

It will be held at 7:30 p.m. in the
COMMUNITY ROOM OF THE SEWICKLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY.

The Indian Capture of Jacob (Kneisle) Nicely

by Ronald Earl Nicely

A Joint Meeting with the
Daniel B. Matthews Historical Society



Telling this story is Ronald Earl Nicely, who was born and raised in Ligonier Township in Westmoreland County. After service in the U. S. Army and a degree from the University of Pittsburgh, Mr. Nicely was employed by the Kennametal Corporation for 35 years. He is now retired and resides in Latrobe, where he keenly pursues history, including that of his own family. His book was published in 2004 in cooperation with Trafford Publishing, Victoria, BC, Canada.

Settler and Indian struggled for possession of this area in the second half of the 18th century. Many an atrocity was perpetrated by both sides in our now quiet forests and dells.

Our lecture this month tells the story of a five-year-old white boy kidnapped in 1775 by Wyandot Indians, torn from all that was dear to him, who curiously later gained prominence – and peace – among the Seneca nation and left a long line of proud Indian descendants. The real beauty of this story is that in modern times the kin of the kidnapped boy, white and Indian, have been able to reconcile and to a degree dispel the unpleasantness of those tumultuous times so long ago.

Our kidnap victim, Jacob Kneisle, came from a German immigrant family that had initially lived in Philadelphia but had moved to Four-Mile Run near Ligonier, Pennsylvania, in 1761. The British encouraged the Indians to terrorize Americans during the Revolution, and the Kneisle incident resulted from this agitation.

Not a few Indian captives found life more congenial among the tribes, and this was the case with Jacob. His Indian name was Crow, given because of a distinctive sound to his crying. He became a skilled deer hunter, married four times and lived among the Seneca at Sandusky, Ohio. His white family thought he was lost, but they learned of his whereabouts in 1828 and tried to effect a reunion. Crow declined to return to his former life.

In 1831, when the lands of the Seneca were ceded to the United States government, Crow became relatively wealthy as a result of the sale of his property. In 1832 he decided to move with his adopted people to a reservation in Oklahoma, an arduous journey of 1000 miles. Shortly after his arrival there in 1833, Crow died of cholera at age 63.

More than 200 years later the Nicely and Whitecrow clans were able to reunite and remember their ancestor and their shared heritage.

Indian Trouble on Big Sewickley Creek

One famous incident that occurred nearby in the spring of 1779 featured the famous scout and Indian fighter Sam Brady. (We are grateful to Allan W. Eckert's *That Dark and Bloody River*, published 1995 by Bantam Books, for the details.)

Brady had been charged by Colonel Daniel Brodhead, in command at Fort McIntosh in today's Beaver, with forming an elite group of rangers to control increasing Indian violence. One of that unit's first adventures occurred along Big Sewickley Creek, as the group patrolled the road east from Fort McIntosh to Fort Pitt looking for Indians who might assault the isolated settlements north of the river or cross the Ohio River to raid there. They picked up the tracks of a party of 25 Indians who were headed up the valley of Big Sewickley Creek. Brady knew that there were some German families settled along that creek, and he feared the worst.

Approaching Big Sewickley's headwaters, the party came to the claim of Jacob Frantz, where they found his burned cabin still smoldering. Nearby lay the bodies of Frantz and his 18 year old daughter, both tomahawked and scalped. In a cornfield they found another man, Elmer Krebs, who was barely alive, having been mortally wounded and scalped. He told of an Indian attack while

the cornfield was being planted. Frantz had been shot outright, and his daughter Sophie murdered because she was lame and could not walk well. A second daughter and two other men had been carried off by the savages.

The Brady party followed their trail. Soon they came to another cabin that had been set ablaze, this one belonging to John Henry, a Dutchman. As there were no bodies, it was assumed that Henry and his wife and two children had been carried off.

The pursuit continued northeast toward the Allegheny. Eventually Brady caught up with some of the Indians, who had camped near a great bend in the river about 60 miles upriver from Pittsburgh. The Indians were surprised at dawn; several were shot, and the rest scattered. The Henry children were rescued. Canoes were constructed to float them down to Pittsburgh, where they were turned over to relatives. The rifles and other plunder that the Indians left behind were auctioned for the benefit of the children. To commemorate the rescue, the site was named Brady's Bend.

Colonel Brodhead was much pleased with his new rangers, but violence was to continue for many years along the frontier.



A 1905 Christmas

Harmonie Associates, Inc. invites you to the Annual Christmas Dinner at Old Economy Village
6:00 p.m., Saturday, December 3, 2005

\$75 per person/ Harmonie Associate Members \$65 per person

The annual Christmas Dinner is a very special event, the only time of year that guests are invited to dine in the Harmony Society's historic Feast Hall. Built in 1826-27, the Feast Hall was used by the Society for special communal meals and for musical concerts. It is now part of the Old Economy Village state historic site in a National Historic Landmark District.

Festively warm attire or 1905 period costumes are suggested for the occasion. Guests may



bring their own bottle of wine and corkscrew for the dinner; a cushion for the hard benches might make the evening more comfortable.

The evening includes hors d'oeuvres in the Granary and tours of Rapp House Exhibits, buffet dinner, auction and raffle, and a musical performance by Anna Singer accompanied by Ray Blackwell and The Old Economy Village Orchestra & Singers, including excerpts from the 1899 Arthur Nevin operetta "The Economites."

Proceeds will benefit the Music Program of Old Economy Village.

Visit the Sewickley Valley Historical Society's website— www.sewickleyhistory.org —for information on upcoming programs, articles on Sewickley landmarks (the Town Clock, Fame, the Sewickley Bridge, the Flatiron Building, the Sewickley Town Hall, and the Old Sewickley Post Office), names of board members, items for sale, etc. In addition, we're in the process of having PhotoDepot scan images in our collection, some of which are now available for purchase through the website.

You can now communicate directly with us on line at sewickleyhistory@verizon.net.

The Social Mirror

Thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, the Historical Society now owns a mint copy of Adelaide Mellier Nevin's *The Social Mirror: A Character Sketch of the Women of Pittsburg [sic] and Vicinity during the First Century of the County's Existence; Society Today* (Pittsburg [sic], Pa., T. W. Nevin Publisher, 1888). Adelaide (1852-1908), a daughter of Daniel Eagle and Margaret Irwin Nevin, was the society editor of the *Pittsburgh Leader*. In the words of Robert Burton, digital production librarian at the University of Pittsburgh, "Certain volumes stand out ... as invaluable materials to social historians.... While not politically correct by today's standards, [*The Social Mirror*] provides a wonderful insight into gender and social status of the era." If you can't get in to the Historical Society to see our copy of the book, you can view it on line in the *Historic Pittsburgh Full-Text Collection* at <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh>.

Below are several examples of the many descriptions of Sewickley Valley women found in the book:

"Mrs. D. C. Herbst is tall...and quite a handsome woman always richly dressed.... The handsome mansion in Sewickley [still standing on Broad Street] is fully and splendidly furnished, a lovely conservatory opening out from the dining-room. Nowhere is to be found more lavish hospitality or more perfect housekeeping and finer table appointments of china, glass and silver. Mrs. Herbst and her daughters drive a spanking team of spirited black horses, a drag in summer and a close carriage in winter....



The Herbst House

"A *petite*, compact figure, dark hair thickly threaded with silver and worn banded, bright, restless, dark eyes, clearly-cut fine features are the striking points...of Mrs. Harry Oliver, the wife of the senior member of the firm of Oliver Bros. She dresses richly, but not showily; is quick in speech and betrays in every movement an inexhaustible fund of energy. The Oliver mansion is beautifully situated on the hill side of Ridge Avenue, Allegheny, and is handsomely fitted up. Their horses and turnouts are stylish and well kept. Mrs. Oliver...entertains frequently and handsomely. The only child is Miss Edith Oliver, a charming...brunette, whose engagement to Harry Rea was announced

in the spring.... [*Farmhill* on Sewickley Heights was the estate of Henry Robinson Rea and Edith Oliver Rea.]



Edith Oliver Rea

"Mrs. Mary Olver, the wife of James Olver, was one of the most remarkable women of her time. She was an English lady, a Miss Gould.... Early in the present century, Mrs. Olver...established at Braddock's Field the famous Edgeworth Female Seminary, at which a large number of the daughters of wealth of that time received their education. It was so named in honor of Maria Edgeworth, the authoress, a personal friend of Mrs. Olver. Afterwards the Seminary was removed to Sewickley, of course retaining the name of Edgeworth, and years after, when the Fort Wayne railroad was built, the station that was placed near the school was given the euphonious and notable name. Mrs. Olver was a lovely Christian, polished and queenly in her bearing. A tombstone in the Sewickley cemetery erected by her scholars record [*sic*] the virtues of this notable woman, 'an elect lady,' as the inscription reads.

"There were few to dispute the palm of beauty with Miss Rebecca Shields in the early forties. Melting, large black eyes, perfect features, riotously curling, dark brown hair, a complexion deliciously tinted, an animated expression, changeful, piquant,

she was peerless. Sully, the famous portrait painter of Philadelphia, was secured by the young girl's proud father to depict the charming features of sweet sixteen, the effort proving a gratifying success. [A copy of the portrait is in the collection of B. G. Shields.] The artist, in love with the sweet face, made a copy for himself. Since then it has been exhibited in London as a typical American beauty. Numerous engravings, under the title of "Sunshine," have been struck off, and are eagerly sought by lovers of the beautiful all over this country and England.



Miss Agnes Way

"In her studio just under the roof, where Miss Agnes Way, of Edgeworth, loves to work, are on every side evidences in the shape of deliciously executed paintings, that she easily takes first rank among the lady artists of the city. For years Miss Way has made her art her profession and both in regard to the sale of pictures and in the instruction of classes has found it vastly profitable." [Several of Miss Way's paintings are in the Sewickley Valley Historical Society collection.]

Signals is designed and edited by
Susan C. Holton

Sponsors, Patrons & Benefactors

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

Mr. & Mrs. Richard K. Brandt; W. Brewster Cockrell; Dr. & Mrs. Robert Fusco;
Perry M. Gwaltney, Jr.; Mr. & Mrs. Robert Y. Kopf; Elena Kornetchuk; G. Christian Lantzsch;
Sarah E. Murdock; Katherine L. Nash; Mr. & Mrs. Fred Sharp, in honor of B. G. Shields;
Frank Simons; Mr. & Mrs. Richard Spatz; Mr. & Mrs. Frank Wasco, Jr., in memory of Georgena Glancy

New Members

The Sewickley Valley Historical Society welcomes the following new members:
Minta Roberts Bauer & Charles R. Volk, Sewickley

In Memoriam

Mary Gwaltney (Mrs. Perry M. Gwaltney, Jr.)
Gary E. Wildman
Don Rose, Jr.



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.



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