

Sewickley Valley Historical Society Signals

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January 2006

Why Aren't There Any Pyramids in Sewickley? The Pre-History of the Sewickley Valley

Saturday, January 28, 2006, 10:30 a.m.,

at the Old Post Office Building, our first program of the new year will feature SVHS member and archaeologist Alan H. Amsler. Mr. Amsler, who lives in Sewickley, is a graduate of the Parsons School of Design and holds a degree in Anthropology from the University of Pittsburgh. After a 30-year career in advertising, he became a practicing archaeologist in Central and South America. His presentation will contrast the civilization of the Meso and South American Indians with that of the less advanced Woodland Indians who lived in this area.

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In Memoriam

Frank C. Schroeder, Jr.
Charles Stinson



Alas, long-time Sewickley resident and SVHS member Margaret A. "Peggy" Sickeler is moving to Chicago to be nearer her grandchildren. Before departing, Peggy made a precious and useful gift to the Historical Society of business records from the store on 527 Blackburn Road known today as Robinson's Home & Garden. There has been a feed and seed store at that site for at least 100 years. Until 1915, the store was owned and managed by W. G. Murray and subsequently by a J. F. Malone. In 1943, Peggy's father, Charles E. Sickeler, who was superintendent on the Singer estate in Edgeworth, purchased the feed store. The Sickeler family presided until the store was sold to the Robinson family in 1989.

The most compelling material dates to around 1910, during the tenure of Mr. Murray. His correspondence with suppliers and customers, account books and original bills he paid to all manner of Sewickley merchants give us an invaluable snapshot of that particular time in our history.

Most of the goods Mr. Murray dealt in came by train. Whole cars would be shuttled to a siding to be unloaded at leisure. Some bulky goods, such as salt, came by steamship to Sewickley landing. Most interesting, impending change is evinced by the simultaneous presence of livery stables and harness makers right next door to garages catering to the newfangled automobile: one finds invoices for both horseshoes and tires! Also, the ledgers recording transactions with the great estates, most of which were working farms, indicate that bills were still mostly rendered to Old Allegheny and East End addresses, as those folks had not yet committed to year-round living in Sewickley, a luxury made possible by the advent of the automobile.

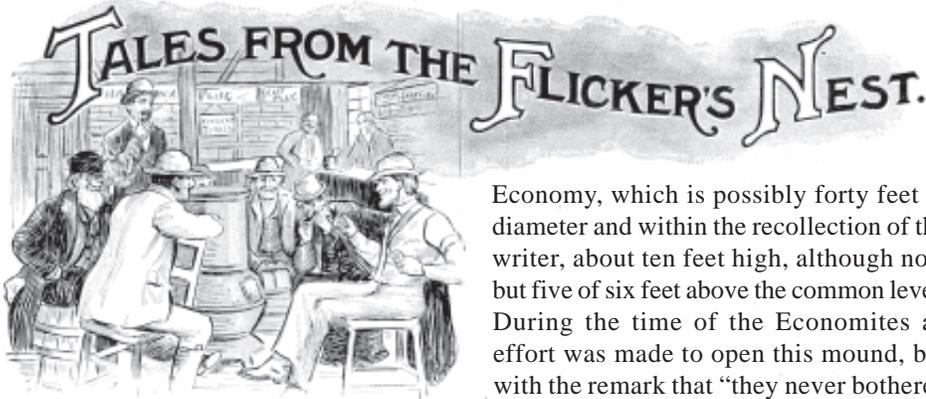
The Historical Society would hope that all members remember how precious even the most mundane artifacts can be and give such papers to the Historical Society for preservation. Thank you Peggy!

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.

Sewickley's Indian Mounds

The following appeared in *The [Weekly] Herald*, Vol. VIII, no. 22, Saturday, January 21, 1911, and is excerpted from "Tales from the Flicker's Nest: Reminiscences of Sewickley Valley," a series of articles by Gilbert Adams Hays, son of General Alexander Hays.



Evidences of the habitation of a race occupying the valley of the Ohio River, preceding that of the Indians, who gave way to the march of civilization scarce more than a century since, are numerous in our immediate vicinity, the so-called "Indian mounds," being the best preserved monuments to these long-forgotten people. Of those still standing one is located on the grounds of Mrs. Agnes Graff, at Shields station, close to the railroad. This mound, about twenty-five feet in diameter and five feet high, perfectly round, as they all are, was opened by Dr. John Dickson and others about fifty years ago, but barring traces of human remains, some stone implements, traces of charred wood and rocks discolored by fire, suggestive of sacrificial uses, there was nothing else. This was the condition of all others opened during various periods. The largest still in existence is that in the orchard, close to the railroad, between Ambridge and

Economy, which is possibly forty feet in diameter and within the recollection of the writer, about ten feet high, although now but five or six feet above the common level. During the time of the Economites an effort was made to open this mound, but with the remark that "they never bothered us, so we will not bother them," Mr. Henrici, head of the Harmony Society, refused permission to disturb original conditions. In recent years, however, the mound was opened by digging a ditch through it, with results previously stated. On the site of the handsome residence of Mr. John Marron, at Quaker Valley station, there was a smaller mound, which was removed at the time the Marron house was built. Two similar sized mounds were in evidence forty years ago in the meadow on the Shields property, between Edgeworth and Shields station., but these have been entirely removed and their exact locations forgotten by all except a few of the older residents.

Thousands of flint arrowheads, spearheads, fleshing knives, toma-hawks, and other stone implements have been found throughout the valley, and can still be found in plowed-up fields. In recent years a handsome stone tomahawk was picked up on Pine Avenue, immediately in front

of the residence of Mr. Gilbert A. Hays. The favorite method of finding these interesting relics was to take a corn field, in mid-summer, just after a heavy rain, when a group of boys, one to each row, would walk miles in search of these interesting trophies, invariably finding quantities. At one time, forty years ago, the writer and his brothers had a soap box filled with flint arrow heads, with a number of larger specimens in tomahawks, etc. In fact Hays & Murphy was a firm of boys which advertised and issued a small catalogue of Indian curiosities for sale at that period. Several large collections of Indian relics are owned in Sewickley Valley, the largest—a wonderful assembly of rare specimens—is that in the residence of Captain Frederick Dippold, at Glen Osborne, the entire family being active enthusiasts in the collection of this class of antiquities. Others of less magnitude are owned by Mr. George H. Clapp, Messrs. Alden F. and Gilbert A. Hays, Prof. Richard Wrenshall and others. Among Prof. Wrenshall's collection are several coins found at Legionville in recent years, dating [to] the period of the French and Indian war under "Mad" Anthony Wayne. It might be added that although over a hundred and fifty years have elapsed several of the breastworks used in this war remain in fine state of preservation:, being located immediately above and along the creek at Legionville, below Economy.

Local history documents the presence of Indians in this area

James Steele, interviewed at 84 in 1872, said that when he came here in 1796 there was a small village of fourteen Indian huts up Big Sewickley Creek on what afterwards was known as the "Buckley Farm," on the opposite side of the creek from Van Cleve Chapel; that some of the Indians remained in this vicinity until some time between 1808 and 1812; and also that they were very improvident and poor.

John Way, Jr., writing in 1888, remembered that in his youth there had been "a colony of Indians that dwelt up Big Sewickley Creek in wretched huts made of poles, covered with clay; and yet [despite the ready availability of guns] they used the bow and arrow."

Visit the Sewickley Valley Historical Society's website at www.sewickleyhistory.org
You can now communicate directly with us on line at sewickleyhistory@verizon.net

Signals is designed and edited by
Susan C. Holton

The Tale of the Barber and the Trout

Once upon a time in the Village of Sewickley, there was a barber whose shop existed before the unisex movement began. Walter's Barber Shop on Broad Street was a club never invaded by the female sex except when a mother popped in to pick up her little Tom, Dick or Harry.

Haircuts went slowly in Walter's shop, because not only was the location in the Koledin Building the owner's means of livelihood, but it served as a podium to relate tales of his life. Indeed, Walter's life was an interesting one, which included the fact that his father, a Pole, had been incarcerated in a Russian jail by the Cossacks. He must have possessed a lot of charm, because the Cossacks befriended him and allowed him to escape to Germany.

After his escape, he made his way to the United States, where Walter was born and where the long Polish surname was changed to Walters.



Walter Z. Walters (1906-1998)

And so, Walter was known in Sewickley as Walter Z. Walters. The Z remains a mystery.

Actually, Walter's father returned to Poland before World War II, and his son followed. After receiving his diploma as a barber in 1929, Walter returned to the United States. His course required four years and included surgery. (In the old days, Polish dentists were licensed to extract

teeth.) Walter began his professional career in Pittsburgh's William Penn Hotel, which in those days employed 18 barbers.

One of Walter's favorite tales relates how at the William Penn he was asked to trim the beard of a fussy Russian diplomat. Afterwards, the diplomat remarked that it was the first time his beard had been trimmed correctly in the United States.

That was only one of Walter's stories that he later put down in a privately printed booklet entitled *60 Years a Barber*. The booklet is filled with reminiscences about his experiences with local residents. One chapter is devoted to the beginnings of the fish-stocking project along Little Sewickley Creek, of which he was a prime mover. Below is Walter's account of his part in the project, which began in the 1950s and is still going on more than 50 years later.

B. G. Shields

LITTLE SEWICKLEY CREEK

An important part of my life was my work to restore a fishing stream in my community. At a meeting of the Sewickley Shooting and Fishing Club during the war years [WWII], I raised the question of our club's name.

"If we are the Shooting and Fishing Club, where's the fishing?" I asked. "We have a fine stream in Sewickley that could be made into a good fishing again."

"Wouldn't that take a lot of money?" someone asked.

"No," I answered, "but it would take a lot of elbow grease."

Before this meeting was over, a committee called The Little Sewickley Creek Project had been formed, and I was selected to be its chairman. So that is how I got involved.

Our first big job was to clean up the stream. Frank Hartle [of Sewickley Hills] and his Boy Scouts were a big help. We picked up all the debris from the stream and got two dump truck loads. We even found a bicycle that I cleaned and repaired to give to a needy boy.

Next, we started building some log dams to make pools for fish, using materials that were donated to us. First, I would anchor a log on each end, and then face it on the upstream side with 2x8s or 2x10s set at a 45-

degree angle. This was to help hold the log in place. Water pouring over the log would pick up oxygen, which helped to purify the water.

We also planted trees along the creek, mostly white pines but also weeping willows and some ornamentals. Not only did the trees improve the looks of the stream, but they also shaded the water. That kept the water temperature low, which was better for trout.

Eventually, the stream was ready to stock with fish. I wanted to get Brown, Brook and Rainbow trout if I could find enough money somehow.

One day I got a letter from a fishing guide in Maine who had heard about the project. He sent me a \$5 bill to help with the expenses because he thought the stream would be good for children. That gave me the idea to raise more money from local people. A number of people did contribute and the Sewickley Garden Club also decided to back me financially. Almost all the money, about 95 percent at least, went to buy fish.

My plan was to restrict the lower half of the stream for only children and young people to fish. Boys up to 16 years and girls of any age were allowed to fish this part. That meant that a mother could fish with her children. The upper half of the stream was

restricted to members of the Sewickley Shooting and Fishing Club, which contributed \$500 a year to the project.

We stocked the stream three times a year and used young children to help with the project. Four or 5-year-old children were given a few trout in a bucket, and they had the fun of releasing these fish into the stream.

Sometimes I wasn't sure how I was going to pay for all the fish. One Saturday afternoon as I was busy in my shop, a man named Robinson Barker came in for a haircut. He was the president of Pittsburgh Plate Glass.

Mr. Barker asked me, "How's your project coming along?"

"I've got a load of trout coming tomorrow morning," I told him. "The bill's going to be \$800 and I'm short \$500 right now. I know my credit is good but I hate to charge it. Mr. Barker didn't say any more about it, but early the next morning he came right to my house [in Edgeworth] and handed me a check for \$500. That was a big, big help, because a truckful of trout was already on the way. In fact, it was a godsend.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped on the Sewickley Creek Project.

Walter Z. Walters

HEPBURN WALKER, JR. (1918-2005)

Parts of the following are adapted from an article in the November 2005 edition of The Airship, newsletter of the Navy Lakehurst Historical Society, a non-profit group dedicated to the preservation of the heritage of the Naval Air Station, Lakehurst, New Jersey.

Edgeworth native Hepburn Walker, Jr., who died in Vero Beach, Florida, on August 3, has been cited as an outstanding contributor to the history of Lighter Than Air Flight by the Navy Lakehurst Historical Society (NLHS), Lakehurst, New Jersey.

Walker had a near-lifelong interest in lighter-than-air (LTA) transport. In a PBS interview, he said, "I was 18 when I [first] saw the Hindenburg. I remember it like it was yesterday. She was flying at about 300-400 foot altitude. The traffic was stopped for a stop light and I had my convertible. I had my top down. The stoplight went red three or four times and nobody moved; they jumped out of their cars just staring. You could see the passengers waving and the crewmen. You see a big thing like that and you think it's hardly believable it can be flying, floating in the air just like a cloud, majestic and beautiful."



NHLS members recall that once when others were paying attention to the Hindenburg, Hep decided to take an unauthorized look at the another vessel, the Los Angeles, all by himself, a feat that had the formidable "Bull" Tobin chasing him through the keel.

After the the Hindenburg disaster, Walker said, also in the PBS interview, "I figured I'd want a few samples of the girder work and the fabric work. I went out there and scuffed my foot and dug up pieces..."

His wartime duties as a Leading Rigger in World War II LTA service ended on a disappointing note when his hopes of serving a new breed of Navy rigid airships proved unattainable.

After his marriage during WWII, he and his wife Shirley, whom he met while stationed at Lakehurst, settled in Toms River, New Jersey, moving to Vero Beach, Florida, in the 1960s. Although involved in various business and investment enterprises, he continued his interest in LTA, helping scores of authors and historians with their publications. Even after being diagnosed with Parkinsons Disease he still traveled to Friedrichshafen, Lakehurst and other LTA points of interest and maintained active communication with LTA scholars and enthusiasts around the world.

Hepburn Walker, Jr., was the son of Hepburn and Eleanor Louise Scott Walker, and grandson of William and Jane Walker of "Muottas." In October 2004 he was present for the Walker Family Reunion marking the centennial of the laying of cornerstone of "Muottas." He was a member of SVHS.



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