

# Sewickley Valley Historical Society

# Signals

XL, Number 3

January 2013



## The Families & Estates of Coraopolis Heights

A Joint Dinner Meeting with the  
Old Moon Township Historical Society

Wednesday, January 23, 2013

Cash Bar, 6:00 p.m. — Dinner, 6:30 p.m. — Program, 7:30 p.m.

Hyeholde Restaurant, Round Room

1516 Coraopolis Heights Road, Moon Township, PA 15108

The program this evening will feature a PowerPoint presentation by Deborah Kennedy, Program Chair of the Old Moon Township Historical Society, prepared by Ron Potter and based on material from *Forgotten Past: A History of Moon Township, Pennsylvania*, by Dr. Robert A. Jockers.

Deborah Kennedy, a 1970 graduate of Moon Area High School, holds degrees from Robert Morris and Slippery Rock Universities. At the latter, she was the first recipient of the History Department's Robert D. Duncan Award for Outstanding Graduate Student. She retired in 2009, after 33 years of teaching Social Studies in the Moon Area School District. During her tenure at Moon, she taught nearly a dozen Social Studies courses, two of which she developed herself. For 14 years, she co-directed and produced musicals and plays at Moon, among which were two plays she wrote: *Aladdin* and *The Wizard of Odds*. Including her years as a student, teacher and director, she was involved in 50 productions on Moon's stage.

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### DINNER MENU

*(All entrées are served with a salad, seasonal sorbet and homemade breads. The price includes tax, gratuity & valet parking.)*

Chicken Piccata *or* Baked Salmon *or* Vegetarian Plate

Asparagus, Herbed Fingerling Potatoes

Crème Brûlée, Coffee/Tea

Please reserve \_\_\_ Chicken Piccata \_\_\_ Baked Salmon \_\_\_ Vegetarian **dinners @ \$30 per person**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to Sewickley Valley Historical Society and return with this form to:  
SVHS, 200 Broad Street, Sewickley, PA 15143

**DEADLINE FOR DINNER RESERVATIONS IS MONDAY, JANUARY 14, 2013.**

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*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 Families & Estates of Coraopolis Heights

*Most of the following information is based on *Forgotten Past: A History of Moon Township, Pennsylvania*, by Robert A. Jockers, D.D.S., published by Xlibris Corporation in 2006. Dr. Jockers founded the Old Moon Township Historical Society in 1975 and served as its president for the next eight years. He is currently the historical society's archivist.*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, as was the case in the heights above Sewickley, Pittsburgh industrialists discovered that the hills above Coraopolis were a desirable place to live. In addition to stunning vistas and fresh air, the area was close to the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad, which made commuting to the city convenient. By 1919, sixteen wealthy families were residents of Coraopolis Heights, adding a new dimension to a community, which, up to that point, had consisted mostly of farmers of modest means. A few of their estates are briefly described below.

The first of the great estates, "Cranston Farm," was established around 1905 by Stewart Johnson, President of Pittsburgh Steel Foundry. The Dutch Gambrel style mansion, sold in 1941, was destroyed by fire in 1958, and the property was later developed into a residential community called "Londonderry Estates."

Also in 1905, Pittsburgh attorney George E. Shaw, purchased a 123-acre farm and commissioned the architects MacClure and Spahr to construct an English Tudor style mansion, which he called "Roselea Farm." Charles Lockhart bought the estate circa 1916, added four rooms to the house and constructed a farmer's cottage. In 1922, the mansion and 32 acres were sold to David Crawford, Vice President of the Locomotive Stoker Company, and in 1923, an additional 25 acres were sold to John R. McCune IV. The Lockharts retained 51 acres, and in 1927 they sold 15 to Lloyd Smith, President of Union National Bank, who would build an estate known as "Baywood." In 1950, the Russell Pattons purchased "Roselea Farm," and the farmer's cottage functions today as a bed and breakfast.

In 1907, Charles M. Robinson, President of Robinson Oil Company, purchased 143 acres and constructed a two-story farmhouse as a summer home for his family. The President of Columbia Steel and Shafting Company, Edward L. Parker, purchased the estate in 1919 and expanded the house. Charles R. Ferguson, a Coraopolis banker, was the next owner, and he expanded the house further. The estate can still be found on Coraopolis Heights Road.

Harvey Childs II, a wealthy Pittsburgh industrialist, built a Federal style mansion in 1908 called "Pine Hill Manor." Subsequent owners, including the Kaufmann family of department store fame, expanded the house and the gardens. In 1962, Robert Morris College purchased "Pine Hill Manor" and used it for faculty housing and administrative purposes. Eventually the house was razed and replaced by a large administration building.

In 1909, John Robinson McCune III of Union National Bank and his wife obtained a 71-acre farm on Coraopolis Heights Road and proceeded to greatly expand the existing farmhouse, creating a grand Greek Revival style mansion and naming it "High Skeog" after Mrs. McCune's family farm in Scotland. The house, which was destroyed by fire in 1938, was reconstructed on the same site by their son, Charles Lockhart McCune.



"Roselea Farm"

After the death of Charles Lockhart McCune in 1979, his executor was approached by Montour Heights Country Club, which was investigating the possibility that "High Skeog" could become the clubhouse for their proposed new 18-hole golf course. The club had been founded in 1912 on Beaver Grade Road as the Sunset Golf Club, which provided sport and social activities for the newly arrived wealthy residents, very similar to the 1904 Al-

legheny Country Club on Sewickley Heights. In 1963, the nine-hole golf course had been expanded to 18 holes with the acquisition of the adjacent W. C. Moreland property, and a new clubhouse and pool were constructed. Development pressures driven by the close proximity of the Pittsburgh Airport made this property very desirable for sale. Fortunately, the McCune estate was obtained by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, which imposed conservation easements and then sold the property to Montour Heights Country Club. Pete Dye was hired to lay out a new golf course, and an architect refitted "High Skeog" for use as a clubhouse. The new club opened in 1987, the old golf course was developed into an industrial park, and the old clubhouse has become the Moon Township Public Library and Community Center.

In 1909, C. J. Lang, founder of the Russell Machine Company, purchased a parcel on Coraopolis Heights Road and constructed "Langhurst," a 12-room, three-story English Tudor style mansion. In 1918, the Langs sold their property to the Serbian Church, which used the house as an orphanage. The estate was subsequently sold as a private residence, which it remains today.

1910 brought Charles H. Curry, president of a glass manufacturing company, and his wife to a 67-acre site on Thorn Run Road, where they built a 25-room Federal style house. Although reduced in size and remodeled, the house survives today.

There was a new round of estate building on Coraopolis Heights in the 1920s. The Dutch Colonial mansion of Philip Gundelfinger, a Coraopolis realtor, was built on Beaver Grade Road in 1922. In

1923, John R. McCune IV purchased land from his uncle, Charles Lockhart, and built a house, which is located on Coraopolis Heights Road between “Roselea Farm” and the back nine of the old Montour Heights Country Club.

In 1924, Francis B. Nimick, President of the Colonial Steel Company, constructed “Robin Hill,” a Georgian style house on Thorn Run Road. Upon the death of Mrs. Nimick in 1971, the house and grounds were bequeathed to the township for use as “parkland forever.”

Lloyd Smith, president of Union National Bank, and his wife purchased 15 acres from Charles Lockhart in 1927 and constructed a

Federal style mansion called “Baywood.” In 1962, “Baywood” was acquired as conference center by the Mobay Chemical Company.

In 1931, William and Clara Kryskill purchased property on the heights and took seven years to construct the French Provincial style home and restaurant they called “Hyeholde,” which still provides an elegant dining experience today.

Only remnants of the high society that made Coraopolis Heights as distinguished as its neighbor in Sewickley survive, but those days are not forgotten.

## To Breathe Fresh Country Air

*The following is excerpted from a charming 1983 account by Hampden Frost Tener (1907-1985) of his early years growing up on Coraopolis Heights, written at the request of B. G. Shields. Included are memories of Raccoon Creek, one-room schools, Montour Heights Country Club, the Audubon Society of Sewickley, Allegheny Country Club horse shows, coon hunts, World War II, the winter of 1936 and the building of Greater Pittsburgh Airport. The entire memoir can be read at <http://thetenerfamily.blogspot.com/2004/09/hampden-frost-tener.html>. Mr. Tener was a regular contributor to the Sewickley Herald under the column heading “The Old Trapper.”*

In the early 1900s, land in the country sold for roughly one hundred dollars an acre, and there was a lot of it on the market.... Beaver Grade Road [was] the only hard road in [Moon] Township [at the time]. This road, known as a Pinchot road after Pennsylvania Governor Gifford Pinchot, ran from Route 30 in Robinson Township to Carnot, where it became the Brodhead Road, then unpaved....

The [Tener] family bought the old homestead on the Beaver Grade Road, Moon Township, in 1909. I remember them saying that it was then a choice between it and the one we came to know as the Bell Farm, which became the foundation of the Greater Pittsburgh Airport. The deciding factor was that our homestead was then on a hard road and the Bell Farm property was not. Also, our property was more than a mile closer to Coraopolis and the P&LE Railroad, and, although not critical, it was important at the time.

You see, in 1909 the first automobiles were a luxury and not dependable. People, as they had done for all time before that, depended upon the horse for transportation. In my father’s case, he used a team of Shetland ponies that could trot the entire five miles each way to the station and back every morning and evening during those first years. One of my earliest recollections is seeing him arrive home on a bitter cold winter evening with his visor hat, designed much like the present ski-mask, covered with white frozen vapor from his breath. He used several lap robes. One was of buffalo, a holdover from the many made when the great herds were hunted in the west in the late 1800s. They also used heated bricks in a tin box to keep the feet warm.

By 1912, the automobiles came more into use and, here again, the fact that our property was on a hard road was a blessing. I don’t think anybody today can imagine the condition of back country roads in the spring of the year after the frost had gone out from under [them]. The cars then were open with canvas tops. There were no starters, no heaters, and no storage batteries. They were equipped with hand wipers, hand horns, hand brakes and carbide gas lights. “Dependable” was the slogan of the Dodge, but the cars were not. It was a sales point for the Franklin that it was air-cooled and would not freeze in cold weather. Also, I recall the Franklin had a laminated

wood frame, supposedly stronger than steel, and a heater wire that ran from the inside direct to the manifold. I also recall that it was years after World War I that a tire was created that would get more than 5000 miles and cost only \$80. All in all, those were the days to forget.

We once had a hired man who was almost useless around the farm but my father kept him on. He did so because the man had worked on the building of hard-surfaced Pinchot and macadam roads....

Our lane from the hard Beaver Grade Road back to the buildings was a long one—about 2000 feet—and it was unpaved. When the frost of winter left the ground, or in the wet seasons of spring and fall, the bottom went out, literally. The topsoil was clay 18 inches deep, then a four-inch layer of blue clay before running into strata of shale and clay. When this became saturated with water, any weight simply sank.

I remember those early mornings when the farmer would hitch on to the front of the car with the team of horses and would pull it through the mud all the way to the hard road. In the evening the farmer and team would be at the entrance when Dad arrived and would pull him back in again. Many of the country residences had two or more lanes so that when the short one became too bad they could use another.

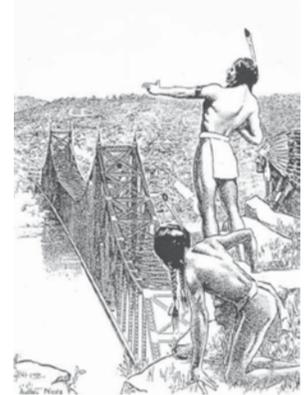
So my father kept on the man who had experience in building the foundations of the hard roads and kept him working on the worst places in our lane. With team and stoneboat, he gathered up all the flat stones around the farm and hauled them to the lane. He dug a trench along the wheel ruts and filled the trench with these stones laid upright, on edge, back to back. He then brought the trench up to grade with broken stone or gravel.

Such was the basis of the Pinchot road. The macadam road went one step further and covered the base layer of stones-on-edge with a mix of tar and gravel to grade. Thus, Governor Gifford Pinchot, and Henry Ford with his Model T with its high wheels, are both credited today as getting the back country farmer out of the mud, here in Pennsylvania.

**Sewickley Valley Historical Society**  
**200 Broad Street**  
**Sewickley, PA 15143**

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**January 2013**



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*Thanks to the following, who have generously supported the Sewickley Valley Historical Society  
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### *In Memoriam*

Dr. Florence Iwler

### *Donations*

Milana Bizic,  
in memory of Thomas Pastorius

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in memory of Edward Hawes

### *New Members*

Mr. Gary L. Walker, Bloomfield Hills, MI  
Mr. & Mrs. Bailey Bishop, Pasadena, CA

## *SVHS Nominating Committee*

The following have been named to the Nominating Committee for 2013-2014. The offices to be filled are President, Vice-President, and three Directors. You are encouraged to contact any member of the Committee with your ideas as to who will best fill these positions. The slate will be announced in March.

Maleet Gordon, Chair	412-741-4731
Brewster Cockrell	412-741-5342
Wayne Murphy	412-741-1068
Agnes Pangburn	412-741-5337
Dan Telep	412-741-2634

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