

Back in the Country... *Bell Acres Stories*

By Debby Rabold

Outdoor Pursuits...Riding and Driving

This is one in a series of articles showing how, for over a century, the Sewickley creeks and surrounding hills have been popular destinations for outdoor activities.



“The roadways leading back of the hills are many and charming. Space forbids their enumeration, but the chief among them is the drive up Little Sewickley creek, past the spring adorned by a handsome stone trough and drinking fountain...Up this stream is found a network of delightful roads, the delight of riding and driving parties. From the elevated portions of these roads can be enjoyed views that are not surpassed in this region of beautiful scenery, and every mile traversed brings a new charm to the eye. The Back Bone road, Anderson’s (famed for its chickens and waffle suppers), Big Sewickley road, and many others, are available for the Sewickleyans.”



Little Sewickley Creek Road appears in the 11 October 1890 issue of **The Bulletin**.

Undated post card showing the famous Little Sewickley Creek spring and water trough.



A FINE SYSTEM OF DRIVEWAYS.

The Sewickley Valley is richly blessed with a number of lovely driveways, the Little Sewickley and Big Sewickley creek roadways with their connections forming a network of drives that are the pride of this Valley. Winding along sparkling rivulets, beneath the leafy boughs, the traveler is rested and refreshed with the scene of beauty all about him. On the hills may be seen elegant country places and palatial residences embellished with quiet grandeur which is pleasing to the eye and which transports the beholder back to the scenes wrought out in some legend or fairy tale.

Sewickley Herald 7 January 1905

AUTOS OUGHTN'T TO.

The roadway up the Little Sewickley Creek is peculiarly adapted to enjoyable, picturesque drives for families in the family rig, especially in summer, when the route is beautiful, and the woman driver and the little ones should have a safe and undisturbed outing. About a year ago the Edgeworth council, recognizing these facts, had signs put up along the road, requesting automobilists to cease using the roadway. These notices have been torn down and broken, and the horse-frightening machines keep on plying upon the romantic roadway along the winding creek. He is an example of defiance and will get somebody into trouble, and which is a disgraceful and selfish disregard of the safety of others and the rights of Edgeworth to protect the dear ones of its residents. Chauffeurs of the machines, which surpass locomotives as horse scarers, should keep off the Little Sewickley Creek Road, as it is narrow and quite dangerous when an auto and vehicle happen to meet. The tearing down and breaking of the signs is an offense against law which will in due time reach the offenders...Keep off the one road best fitted for family drives.

Sewickley Herald 16 June 1906

Improving Little Sewickley Creek Road.

The picturesque, shaded, curving Little Sewickley Creek Road used for many years exclusively by horse drawn vehicles, bicycles or riding horses, is yielding to progress. Of course, lately, the highly crowned road has borne its share of automobile traffic, but its narrowness, the curves sloping the wrong way and the sharp turns have made it dangerous to traverse at any usual speed.

Sewickley Herald 7 September 1934

The State assumed responsibility for maintaining the road in 1933-34 when it realigned, graded and paved the old township road.



View of Little Sewickley Road. Short distance from celebrated Little Sewickley Spring. 1907.

The Auto in Sewickley

Club Sewickley has its coterie of motorists though the sport is not so popular as one would expect in a suburb which has the finest streets in this part of the state. Some Sewickleyans are prejudiced against the motor car, and justly so, for certain unreasoning and unthinking individuals have gone down there and driven their machines through the town at a fearful pace, frightening horses and doing damage. At each end of the town and through it are notices that the limit of speed is eight miles an hour. The Sewickley people keep up the roads—the finest to be found anywhere--- and certainly they have a right to dictate how fast vehicles shall be driven over the. Not with standing this, one hired chauffeur very recently drove through Sewickley at a speed of 30 miles an hour, while another motorist drove so recklessly that he is prohibited from driving back into the borough for one year. The place being an aristocratic section, many families own large stables, and drive constantly. Children too, are out in pony carts and reckless motor driving is a menace to the community. The Little Sewickley Creek road (that suburb's Champs Elysees) has a narrow bank to the left, which is extremely dangerous in case of accident. No one blames Sewickleyites for being opposed to the present recklessness of some chauffeurs, but it's a pity in this case, as always, that careful, judicious motorists are obliged to suffer with the guilty. A number of Sewickley men use motor cars, and their driving has done much to popularize the sport there...The run to Sewickley from Pittsburgh will be one of the most popular drives this summer, for by June the route will be practically all macadamized from Allegheny out the Perrysville road to Blackburn and on through to the Allegheny Country Club.

Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette 3 April 1904

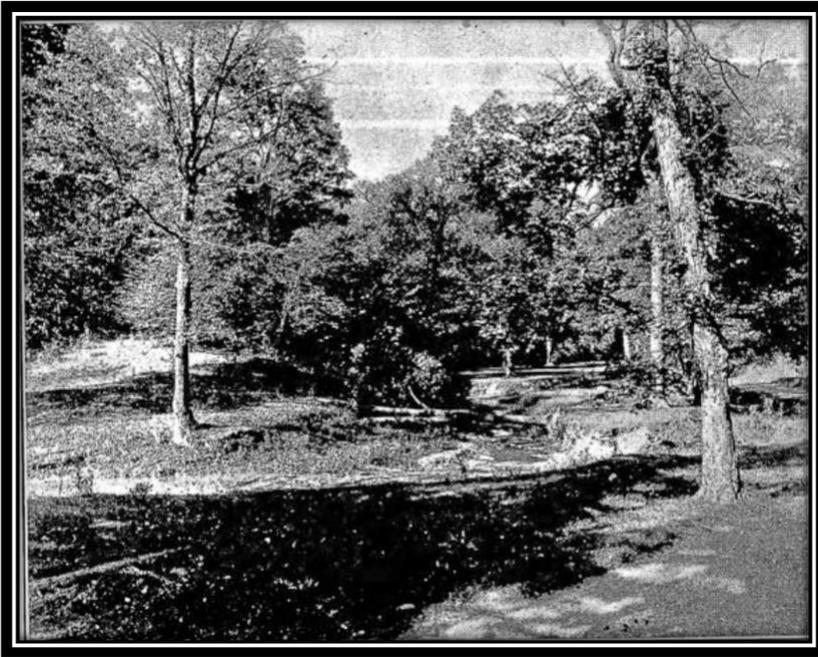


Mr. G. T. Braden purchased Sewickley's first automobile, a Locomobile. An addition was built onto his stable to house the vehicle. Pictured is an 1899 model.



Referred to as "Big Sewickley" or "Big Creek", the Big Sewickley Creek serves as the boundary between Allegheny and Beaver counties. As was the nearby Little Sewickley Creek Road, Big Sewickley Creek Road was a popular destination for drives and outdoor activities. In use since the early 1800s, the road was realigned and paved by Allegheny County in 1925 before being turned over to the State.

(Courtesy of the Laughlin Memorial Library)



The Favorite Picnic Ground

There are not many summer evenings when these meadows along Turkey-Foot Creek are not the scene of picnic suppers, and on a pleasant Saturday or Sunday there are often a dozen open-air suppers at once scattered along the little stream, with autos parked in the grass and children bathing in the stream. It is the most popular outing-spot in all the woodlands of this vicinity.

Sewickley Herald 4 October 1919

From the 1890s into the 1920s, Sewickley Valley residents picnicked at Turkeyfoot, the popular grove located at Turkeyfoot Run on Big Sewickley Creek. It was used by families, churches, schools and social organizations.

Big Sewickley Creek Valley looking West from the Duff City-Camp Meeting Road intersection with Big Sewickley Creek Road at Bergers Bridge (1940).



Hopkins Chapel--

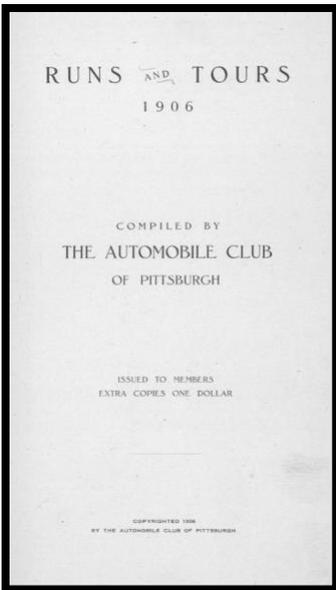
“Sewickley automobilists who have grown somewhat tired of the regular Sunday excursion over the macadam roads hereabouts, with their dust and crowding, may well consider another way of enjoying the day of rest. Why not go to church!

The beloved automobile can be used for other purposes than sight-seeing and the pleasantest riding is that which has some definite goal; that is the peculiar charm of touring. And there are many places hereabouts interesting or curious which might well be the goal—if only they were better known.

Out by the headwaters of the Big Sewickley Creek is a quaint old brick chapel or church known as Hopkins Chapel that is well worth a Sunday afternoon visit, both because it is a beautiful ride with plenty of different routes for the return trip, and because it is a place with a history.”

Sewickley Herald 5 August 1916





Automobiles became more popular as they became more affordable. Automobile clubs and newspapers published directions for day trips around the Pittsburgh area.

Leetsdale to Wall Rose	
Route 27	
	MILES
LEETSDALE.....	0
FAIR OAKS.	1.4
T. R. at small stone church up Big Sewickley Creek.	
Take first R. F. at (<i>Turkey Foot Road to L.</i>)	3.3
Follow Big Sewickley Creek.	
(<i>At 6.5 mi. pass road to L. to Baden 3.5 mi., rough.</i>)	
T. R. on Three Degree or Old State Road at.	8
WALL ROSE	8.8
(<i>Follow poles to Duff City, 11.5 mi.</i>)	

Big Sewickley Creek Motorlogue

Excerpts from the March 24, 1929 *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*

The newspaper's tour of Northern Allegheny County included a description of the Big Sewickley Creek Valley as it appeared in 1929.

"In Leetsdale a slight right turn was made at the first traffic beacon, the route here following for a few hundred feet over a brick pavement that is a bit rough. A sharp right turn is made just before reaching a small bridge...Continuing up the valley road the motorist may enjoy to the greatest extent a picture of Nature in rolling hills and green fields, evergreen trees and a rugged countryside."

"Spring was never greeted with more enthusiasm anywhere than by the simple farmer folk in the valley along Big Sewickley Creek. It meant a revival of all the interests and beauties of life and they knew of no district that was more beautiful than their own."

For many years, the country drained by Big Sewickley Creek and its tributaries has been the mecca of countless Nature lovers of the Pittsburgh district. This Sunday hundreds of motorists following the first of the season's Sun-Telegraph's Motorlogues will join with other Nature lovers in greeting spring in this picturesque land."



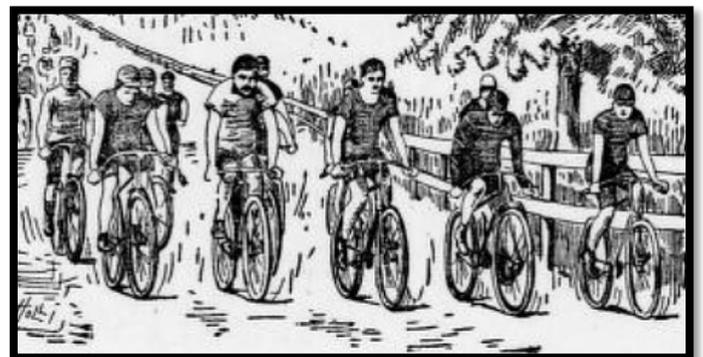
Big Sewickley Creek Road in 1925.





Country roads through the wooded hills behind Sewickley were popular for Sunday drives, especially after they were paved. Clockwise from top: Beaver Road, Oliver Road (now Fern Hollow Road) and Little Sewickley Creek.

In addition to riding and driving activities on country roads, cycling was a once popular sport that saw wheelmen or cyclists holding group rides and races on Beaver and Big Sewickley Creek roads. At one time, Sewickley Borough considered imposing a cycling speed limit. Sewickley, like other communities, had an active cycling club.



“Summer evenings saw the club members on the road. Usually they would meet at the Athletic Grounds [near the Water Works], then in groups down Beaver Road they would go and out Little or Big Sewickley creek where the favorite gathering place was at the top of the rise just beyond the Van Cleve Chapel [on Big Sewickley Creek Road in Sewickley Township]. Then toward dusk came the return trip to the club house porch for a smoke, a chat and later, lighting the oil lamps that hung from front wheel hubs inside the spokes, the riders wended their several ways homeward.”

Sewickley Herald 6/7/1928

Roadways along the Sewickley creeks and through the surrounding hills have long been popular with those wishing to explore and enjoy the unspoiled countryside. The **Outdoor Pursuits** series examines how for more than a century, this area has attracted horseback riders, campers, bird watchers, swimmers, hikers, fishermen, picnickers, bike riders, golfers and lovers of nature.