

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

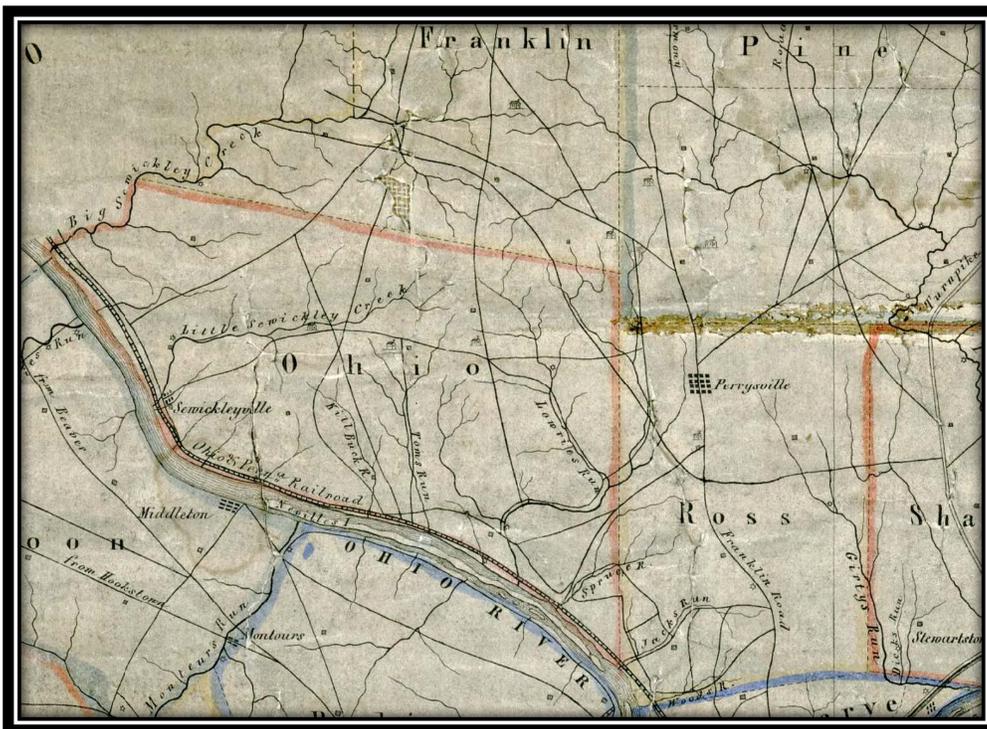
By Debby Rabold

BOUNDARIES

Pennsylvania originally consisted of three counties in the Philadelphia area. As population grew and pushed westward, more counties were gradually added. None of the early counties looked the same as today because boundaries were constantly redrawn.

Pittsburgh was once part of Cumberland County. To conduct business, residents had to travel 100 miles eastward over the mountains to the county seat of Bedford. Once a sufficient number of persons took up residence west of the mountains, the new county of Westmoreland was created in 1773 with the county seat of Hannastown only thirty miles distant.

Because the Pennsylvania colony's western boundary was not set, the Virginia colony laid claim to what is now Washington and a portion of Allegheny counties, including the town of Pittsburgh. Many early settlers of Southwestern Pennsylvania were Virginians. The colonies almost went to war over ownership, but peace was restored once a boundary was established.

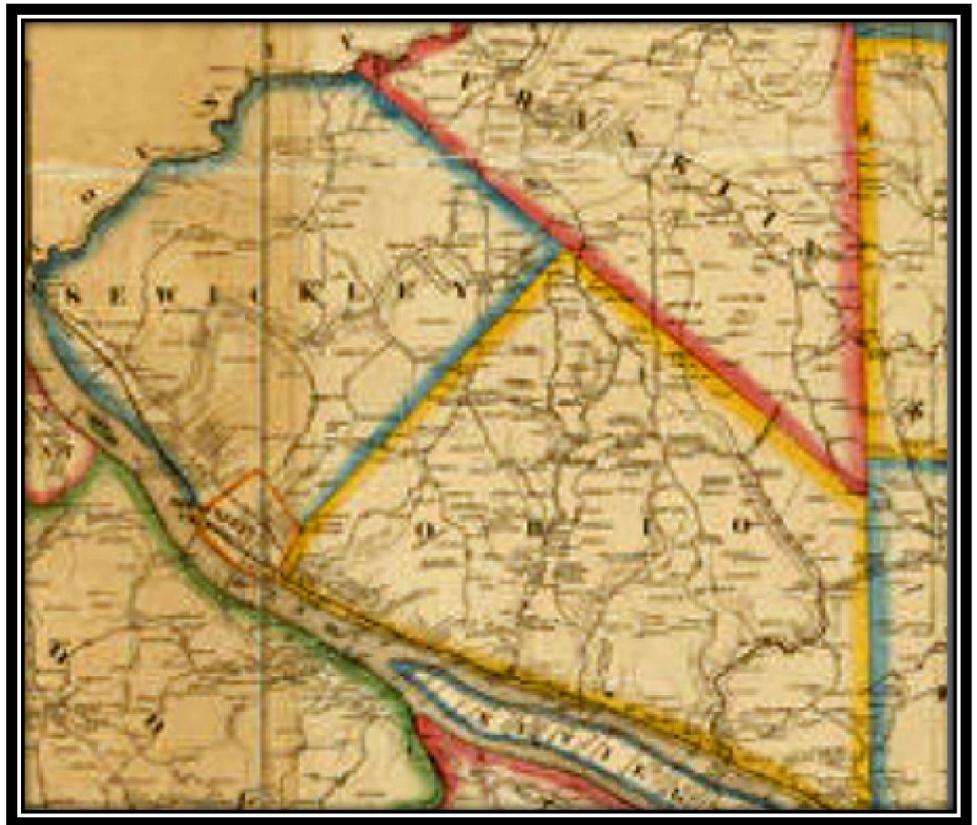


In September 1788, Allegheny County was created from portions of Westmoreland and Washington counties. Lands north of the Ohio River as far as Lake Erie were then added to the new county. In 1800, Allegheny County took its present shape after Beaver, Butler, Crawford, Erie, Mercer, Venango and Warren counties separated. Lawrence was later created from portions of Beaver and Mercer counties.

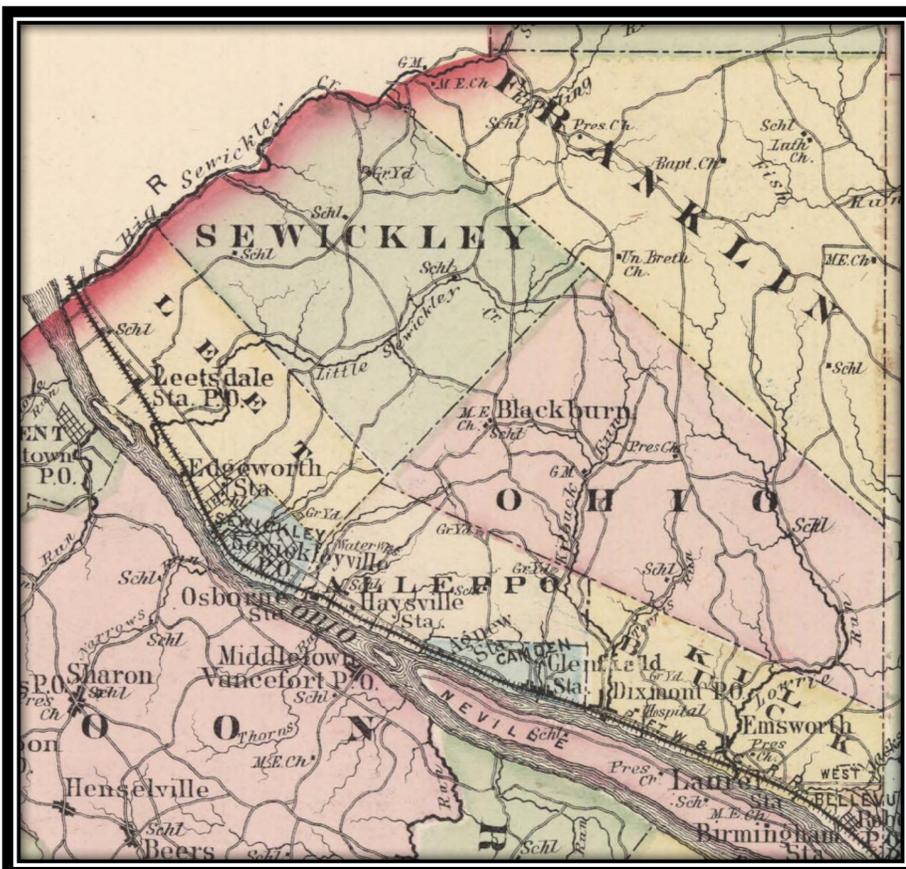
Allegheny County originally consisted of seven townships with the entire North Hills in Pitt Township. Pitt was soon divided into Pine and Deer townships. In 1803, Ohio Township was carved from Pine. The new township extended nine miles along the north shore of the Ohio River and northward to the Butler County line. New townships were usually created to reduce the distance and amount of travel needed to attend school and vote. (Above: 1850 Ohio Township)

In 1823, Franklin Township (now Franklin Park, Bradford Woods & Marshall) was the first municipality to split from Ohio. It was followed by Sewickley Borough in 1853 and Sewickley Township (now Bell Acres, Leet, Edgeworth, Leetsdale with portions of Sewickley Heights & Sewickley Hills) in 1854.

The breakup of existing municipalities to create new ones continued. In 1869, Leet left Sewickley Township, taking with it the future Edgeworth and Leetsdale (1904). Also in 1904, Sewickley Heights Township was created from parts of Sewickley, Leet, Ohio and Alleppo townships.



1862 Sewickley Township



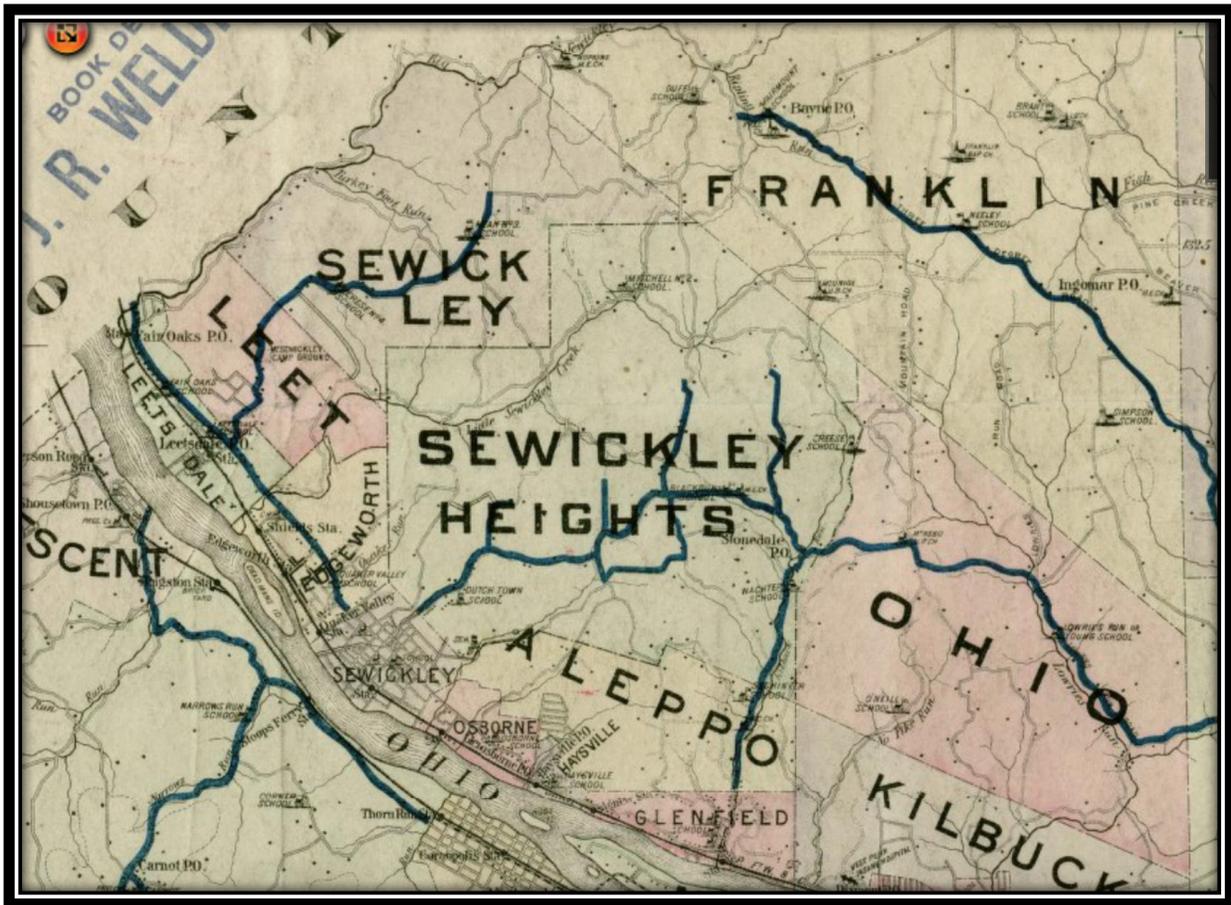
1876 Sewickley Township

In 1935, a group of Sewickley Heights residents received court approval to cede from the township and form Sewickley Heights Borough. What remained became Sewickley Hills Borough in 1958.

Circa 1912, Franklin residents living along Big Sewickley Creek received court approval to leave the township and join Sewickley Township, resulting in Franklin losing the "tip" of its triangular shape. As recently as 1969, the Bell Acres, Sewickley Hills and Franklin Park boundary was adjusted.

Soon after celebrating its 100th year anniversary (1954), Sewickley Township found itself under threat of losing more of its remaining acreage, prompting residents to seek the protection of borough status. In the municipal hierarchy, boroughs and first class townships have the right to annex second class townships, but cannot annex a borough. With Sewickley Heights Borough having just annexed two more acres and eyeing the soon to be built Sewickley Heights Golf Club tract, township residents sought and received the protection of borough status (1960). The new borough was named Bell Acres in recognition of John A. Bell, Jr's expansive Jonabell Farm that straddled Camp Meeting Road.

At the same time, neighboring Franklin Township faced a serious threat of its own. Unhappy with Franklin's large building lot requirement, a golf club developer drew plans to create King Ridge Borough within the township. Once established, the new borough could have annexed the remainder of the township, marking the end of Franklin and its large lot requirement. There was also concern that adjacent Bell Acres and Sewickley Hills boroughs might take an interest in acquiring parts of Franklin. Petitions were signed, hearings were held and in the end, Franklin Township became the Borough of Franklin Park (1961).



1907 Allegheny County map showing macadamized (hard top) roads.