

Prof. Herbert H. Beck

Compliments of
Charles I. Landis

Thaddeus Stevens

A LETTER WRITTEN TO THE DAILY NEW ERA,
LANCASTER, PA., BY HON. CHARLES I. LANDIS,
PRESIDENT JUDGE OF THE SECOND
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Lancaster History

THADDEUS STEVENS

AS a supplement to a recent letter written by First Deputy Attorney General Keller, in answer to statements made by one, Thomas Dixon, concerning the late Thaddeus Stevens, will you permit me to furnish some facts chiefly gleaned from records, and, therefore, not open to dispute? Historic lies, as has been recently shown by Prof. Albert Bushnell Hart, are, after a time, taken as actual truths, and it would, therefore, seem to be best to expose, if possible, the falsity of Mr. Dixon's claims before the evidence is lost or has been forgotten.

Mr. Stevens was born on April 4, 1792. He came to Pennsylvania about 1815, and he was admitted to the Bar of Adams county on September 24, 1816. While in Gettysburg, he had an office at the southeast corner of Chambersburg and Washington streets. I am informed, and I think reliably, that he did not then keep house, but boarded at the old Washington Hotel. He moved to Lancaster and was admitted to the Lancaster County Bar on August 16, 1842. He was then over fifty years of age. On April 21, 1843, he acquired, by virtue of a Sheriff's sale, the lot and two houses located on the northeast corner of South Queen and East Vine streets, in this city. From 1856 until his death he made the northernmost of these houses his home, except when in Washington, and he was buried from it. He could only have acquired possession of this property under the

Sheriff's deed during the summer or fall of 1843.

He never lived with any woman by the name of Lydia Brown. Mr. Dixon, no doubt, refers to Lydia H. Smith, a colored woman, who was, for many years, the trusted housekeeper of Mr. Stevens. She did not come to Lancaster with him. About the spring of 1844, the late Emanuel C. Reigart erected on the west side of South Queen street, between Centre Square and Vine streets, three three-story brick dwellings. One of these, then numbered 11, but now numbered 33, he leased to Mr. Stevens, and the others were occupied by Hon. Thomas H. Burrowes and Charles B. Penrose, Esq., the grandfather of Senator Boies Penrose. Mr. Penrose was then a practicing lawyer in this city. Mr. Stevens remained in this location until 1856, when, owing to the pending marriage of Mr. Reigart's daughter to the late William P. Brinton, he was obliged to vacate. He then moved across the street to his own house. Mrs. Brinton was married on November 12, 1856, and shortly thereafter moved to the South Queen street property, where she continued to reside, as we all know, until recent years.

When Mr. Stevens began house-keeping, being a single man, he was obliged to secure a housekeeper. He first endeavored to employ a woman by the name of Anna Sulkey; but this woman, about that time, became the wife of Dennis Martin, a colored barber, who lived in Lancaster. She, therefore, while declining the position, recommended to him her cousin, Lydia H. Smith, then a widow with two small children. Upon this recommendation, Mr. Stevens engaged Mrs. Smith, who, shortly thereafter, came to Lancaster and remained with him until his death.

She occupied, when her children lived with her, a one-story frame house on the rear of Mr. Stevens' lot, fronting on South Christian street. His nephews, Simon Stevens, and Major Thaddeus Stevens, Jr., lived for the most time with him. These gentlemen were also members of the Lancaster County Bar, the former being admitted in 1848 and the latter in 1859. Mr. Stevens died at Washington on August 11, 1868, and he was buried in Shreiner's Cemetery, in Lancaster, on August 15, 1868. He gave no directions in his will as to his place of burial, but it is said that he requested that he should be buried in this cemetery because the charters of the Lancaster and Woodward Hill Cemeteries, in which he had had lots, restricted interments to white persons. He prepared his own epitaph, which is upon his tomb. True to those principles of equality which he steadfastly maintained in life, and, as Congressman McCall, in his Life of Stevens, declares, "a true democrat," he wished to repose in a plot where no limitations prevailed as to color, race or creed.

Martin Shreiner was in his day one of the prominent and reputable citizens of Lancaster city. Many of his descendants continue to live here, and a number of them are buried in the above-named cemetery. In his lifetime, he laid out, as a place of burial, a plot of ground at the corner of West Chestnut and North Mulberry streets. He called it Concord Cemetery, but it has been generally known as Shreiner's Cemetery. He divided it into 120 lots, and, in his life, he sold and made deeds for some of these lots. The sole restriction contained in the deeds was, that suicides should not be buried there. Mr. Shreiner died

about February, 1866, and his will, dated May 2, 1855, was proven February 22, 1866. In it, he provided as follows: "Item—It is my will and I order and direct that the two lots of ground at the corner of Mulberry and Chestnut streets, in the city of Lancaster, which I purchased from Phillip Reitzel and wife, shall be used and kept as a cemetery, and laid out in lots or pieces according to the plan thereof, and be sold by my executors at private sale, hereby giving my said executors or the survivor of them full power to make, execute and deliver to the purchasers good and sufficient deeds in fee for the same." He also provided that, after the death of his daughters, the lot-holders of the cemetery should, from time to time, select three suitable persons out of their number to take charge of and to care for the cemetery, and that, after the death of his executors and all of his daughters, these three persons should sell the burial lots then undisposed of, make deeds for the same, and pay over the proceeds to his heirs and legal representatives. The present trustees of the cemetery are Henry M. Shreiner, John J. Knight and George W. Gibbs. There are now buried in this plot 856 persons, of whom 850 are white and six are colored. When Mr. Stevens was buried, only one colored man, whose name was John Johnson, was interred in it. Mr. Dixon states that Mr. Stevens and this colored woman were buried in a negro cemetery, side by side, and even an historian of our own State, who evidently made no inquiry into the true facts, has asserted that he was buried in a negro cemetery. The incorrectness of these assertions is obvious from the above and the following facts:

Lydia H. Smith was born in Gettysburg, on St. Valentine's Day, 1813.

She was married to Jacob Smith, who was a teamster and musician. They had two children, William, who was born in 1836, and Isaac, who was born in 1844. Jacob Smith died at Gettysburg and he was there buried. As she brought her two boys to Lancaster with her, it follows that they were born before she became Mr. Stevens' housekeeper. Mrs. Smith, after Mr. Stevens' death, kept a boarding house in Washington, D. C., and she died in a hospital in that city on Saint Valentine's Day, 1884. Her remains were brought to Lancaster, taken to the house of the late George Heiss, and her funeral was held there. Mr. Heiss was, in his day, a prominent tobacco dealer, and, for several years, represented the Third ward in Common Council, and he at that time was the tenant of the old Stevens mansion. She was, by direction contained in her will, buried in her lot in Saint Mary's Catholic Cemetery, of which church she had long been a member. The following are the inscriptions on her monument and on the one erected for her sons in that cemetery:

LYDIA HAMILTON

Relict of

JACOB SMITH

For many years the trusted
housekeeper of

HON. THADDEUS STEVENS.

Born at Gettysburg, Penna.,
on St. Valentine's Day, 1813.
Died at Washington, D. C.,
on St. Valentine's Day, 1884.

ISAAC

Died April 7, 1884,
In the 37th year of his age.

WILLIAM

Died May 10, 1860,
In the 25th year of his age.

SONS OF

JACOB & LYDIA H. SMITH.

The late Walter M. Franklin, Esq., was one of her executors.

I have no recollection personally of Mrs. Smith, but many persons are still living who knew her well. She is said to have been comely in appearance, light in color, and exceedingly intelligent and entertaining. She was a decent and respectable woman, and she always kept herself quite within her station. Not a particle of evidence to the contrary has ever been produced. If at any time she was brusque to those who addressed her in a rude and unmannerly way little blame can be made against her on that account. Dr. Henry Carpenter, of this city, was Mr. Stevens' and President James Buchanan's physician, and he also attended her professionally. In politics, he was a leading Democrat. Hon. Thomas H. Burrowes, one-time Secretary of State, and the first Superintendent of Common Schools of this State, was a leading Republican and also a close friend of Mr. Stevens. Mrs. Smith was often at the houses of these gentlemen and of others of like social position in the city, and she was on terms of intimacy with their families. In her will she bequeathed to the three daughters of Dr. Carpenter and to his stepson, to one of the daughters of Mr. Burrowes, and to Mrs. Kerfoot, the wife of the late Dr. George B. Kerfoot, small legacies, in appreciation of the kindness which she had received from them. If she had been a woman of bad character, is it likely that ladies of this standing would have shown her any regard? To every one to whom these ladies were or are known, for some of them are yet alive, the question answers itself. I very well recall Isaac Smith, who was commonly known as "Little Ike"

Smith. For some years he kept a barber shop on South Queen street. He was, like his father, musically inclined, and was the leader of the colored band. He was small in stature and very black, and it was evident, from his appearance, that there was not the slightest trace of Caucasian blood in his veins.

Mr. Stevens cared nothing for social life, but he, nevertheless, did not disregard what he deemed were the amenities belonging to his position. During his later Congressional years he gave large parties, which many prominent people of this city attended. The following is a copy of one of his invitations, now in the possession of Mr. George Steinman:

"Lancaster, Aug. 21st, 1860.

"Mr. Thaddeus Stevens requests the company of Mr. & Mrs. Wm. Wright on the evening of Friday, the 24th inst."

Owing to his having no female relatives in his home, at one of these parties his friend and neighbor, Mrs. Brinton, received for him, and at another Mrs. Oliver J. Dickey performed the same service. The purpose I have in view of recalling these functions of bygone days is to show that Mr. Stevens, instead of being a man of low character and associations, as asserted by his detractors, was recognized and esteemed in this community as a gentleman of standing. He was a lawyer of large practice and the leader of the Lancaster Bar. He was president of the Lancaster Law Library Association, the only organization of lawyers existing in Lancaster county at that time, from 1858 until the time of his death. From 1842, for about twenty years, he appeared before the Supreme Court in 125 cases. In fact,

he was concerned in all the important litigation and in almost all the cases appealed from his county to that Court, up to about 1862, when his Congressional duties prevented him from devoting much time to his law practice. On May 9, 1853, on behalf of the Bar of the State, he, at Harrisburg, announced the death of Judge John B. Gibson, before the Supreme Court. I note these activities to show what manner of man he was in his professional life.

Pennsylvania College was founded in 1832 at Gettysburg, under the auspices of the General Synod of the Lutheran Church. Mr. Stevens was, as I have said, at that time practicing law in Adams county, and he resided there. In 1834 he was elected a trustee of this institution, and he continued to hold that position during the rest of his life. In its earlier years he took a conspicuous part in the business of the college, and by his will he bequeathed to it the sum of \$1,000. It will be remembered that Gettysburg was then, and is even now, a small town, where members of the Bar, especially, were well known. Mr. Stevens would not have been thus connected with this church institution, if, at that time, his morals were as questionable as Dixon asserts.

He was also a politician of unrivalled acumen. The two pursuits—the law and politics—filled the important places in his life. He made no false professions as to his personal or political beliefs. He was a radical Republican, and, as such, was willing to go the limit for his cause. In the great conflict of the Civil War, he was one of the "sheet-anchors" of the Union. The bitter animosities which grew out of it gave rise to these sensational scandals, and, solely upon the idle rumors

which his bitter enemies started, was Dixon, in "The Clansman" and in "The Birth of a Nation," based his slanderous story. Men may differ with Mr. Stevens as to the wisdom of placing at that time the ballot in the hands of the colored race; but none can fail to realize the seriousness of the questions which then confronted the statesman. Mr. Stevens advocated this measure because he deemed it necessary for their protection, and the action, after the war, of the Legislatures elected in some of the Southern States during the Presidency of Andrew Johnson well warranted this conclusion. For many years Mr. Stevens ably represented this district in Congress, and his memory is revered by a large majority of our citizens. I, with others, feel that the lies and misstatements again reiterated concerning him should not go unchallenged. For his mighty efforts in its behalf, he deserves well of his country, and his memory should not be falsified in history.

In conclusion, I ask all fair-minded persons whether Mr. Dixon is entitled to command confidence; in fact, whether he is worthy of any credit, when it is taken into account that he personally can have no knowledge as to the facts which he asserts, and when it is also considered that he has circulated a sensational story chiefly to stir up racial and sectional bitterness, in order that he may thereby put money in his purse.

CHARLES I. LANDIS.