

# REUBEN CHAMBERS, EDITOR OF THE BETHANIA PALLADIUM

By GEORGE W. HENSEL, JR.

**A**BOUT thirty-five years ago, the late Robert J. Houston wrote a biographical sketch of Reuben Chambers, the eccentric and irascible editor of The Bethania Palladium, a small four-page weekly newspaper published in Puddingtown, subsequently known as Bethania, Lancaster county, Pa. Mr. Houston's excellent article appears in Vol. I, pp. 119-132, of the Proceedings of The Lancaster County Historical Society. Since that article was published, I have secured a file of The Bethania Palladium from which I have used a number of items which give us an interesting insight into some of the local and general activities of that day and reflect the character and personality of this eccentric village editor and Quaker philosopher.

Puddingtown is situated on the old Strasburg and West Chester pike, about two miles west of Gap. For a small village, it has had many names. It was first called Puddingtown; then, Jacksonville, in honor of Andrew Jackson; and subsequently Bethania. The present proprietor favors the original name of Puddingtown as many folks having knowledge of the place prefer it; and it now seems likely that as "Puddingtown," it will go down the ages.

As early as 1820, it consisted of a wheelwright and blacksmith shop, and one or two residences. In 1825 Samuel Hoar erected several houses; and in 1831 Reuben Chambers established a printing office, book bindery and pottery on the main street. A few years later, a public house of entertainment was opened, and the finishing touches were put on the place when Anthony Wilkeson began weaving carpets, and for this purpose attempted to utilize all the carpet rags made within the shadows of the Welsh mountains.

Puddingtown was at the height of its glory about this period, with the Gap alarmed at the growing importance of its nearby and competing neighbor. Reuben Chambers was the outstanding citizen. He was the local captain of industry, the village school mas-

ter, prominent Quaker, and a man of more than ordinary ability with pronounced views and strong prejudices. He was anti-Jackson, anti-Mason, anti-whisky, anti-race track and anti-fox chase. He was easily the "antiest" citizen of his day in Lancaster county.

#### FEARED MODERN TENDENCIES.

He "viewed with alarm" modern tendencies, and sought to stem the tide by establishing a local newspaper of his own for the spreading of his opinions. Of his paper, he was the printer, publisher and editor.<sup>1</sup> To express his contempt for Jackson, he changed the name of Jacksonville, as the village began to be known, to "Bethania," and began the printing of The Bethania Palladium.

In the "Prospectus" published in his first issue, he said: "I have long wanted to see in circulation a newspaper adapted to the capacity and wants of the youth and others in the United States, free and untrammelled by the unseen scheming of designing men and parties, and opposed to war, slavery, intemperance, military honors and achievements; and to the many inconsistencies that are practiced almost to a desperate extent, thereby converting the blessings of Providence into a curse, and destroying the morals of the young and unwary by the affluence of corrupt and vicious customs."

He covered considerable territory, and visualized a wide circulation. He named as official agents for his paper the proprietors of rural stores, many of whom were postmasters, and men of local prominence and influence. Subsequently, he defended the cause of the Red Man, who, in his judgment, was the victim of persecution and chicanery.

#### ASSUMED A BIG TASK.

Reuben Chambers was assuming a big task. It was no one man's job to attempt to oppose, enlighten and guide "Old Hickory" Jackson. To seek to curb the horse-racing proclivities of Gap sportsmen might well have engaged a host of moralists. With foxes plentiful and hounds eager for the chase, it was a task of

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<sup>1</sup> The first issue of The Bethania Palladium is dated "6th day, — 6th Month, 8th, 1832." A file of this newspaper, covering the period from June 8th, 1832, to September 19th, 1834, is in the collections of The Lancaster County Historical Society.

no mean proportions to convince the Rutters, the Skileses and the Worst of those days of the error of their ways.

To settle the slavery question at Bethania, with the statesmen and politicians at Washington unable to solve it, was a stupendous undertaking; and with whisky selling at twenty-five cents a gallon, and the quality good, the flow of that beverage, like Tennyson's brook, seemed destined to go on forever.

But Reuben was bold. He would stop the parade of men traveling east by way of the Masonic route. He conceived the time was opportune, the place was Bethania. He constituted himself the dominating and inspiring crusader of all reforms, and fared forth bravely and vigorously on his journey of conquest.

His horror of horse-racing was thus expressed: "I understand the Lancaster Jockey club proposes continuing its abominable practices of racing horses over the Hamilton course at the city of Lancaster, Pa., and the railroad will make a bend to save the track. If I forget not, I have been told that last year the court of Lancaster county caused an adjournment to allow the judges and the jurors, the lawyers and the sheriff, the scribes and the Pharisees, or any who wished, to go to the races; and even had the constituted authorities stationed on the racing ground to keep order."<sup>2</sup>

#### OPPOSED HORSE-RACING

He further declared that horse-racing is worse than horse stealing, and those who practice it, after the custom of the Jockey club of Lancaster, are worse than horse thieves because it has a worse effect on individuals. Accordingly, he called upon Edward Parker, treasurer of the Jockey club, to protest against the sport, whereupon Parker called him vile names and threatened to "smack his chops."<sup>3</sup>

Folks in this county familiar with the life of the sheriff of Lancaster county at that time, "Dare Devil" Dave Miller, will realize how profoundly he must have been impressed with the futility of Reuben's indignation and efforts. In the following issue of the Palladium Chambers termed Edward Parker the arch gambler of Lancaster, the agent of Satan himself.

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<sup>2</sup> In the issue of August 3rd, 1832, it is stated that the races would commence on September 18th.

<sup>3</sup> October 12th, 1832.

But horse-racing continued. About thirty-five years ago Frank Seldomridge, with the sporting blood of his ancestors, built a one-mile track at White Horse and provided a quality of athletic sports, hereto unknown in that community, to enlist the interest and patronage even of the Amish brethren.

But the anti-Masonic party had had great strength in Reuben's day and generation. Thaddeus Stevens was his inspiration. William Wirt, a subscriber of the Palladium, was nominated for president of the United States on the anti-Masonic ticket; and Amos Ellmaker, of this county, neighbor and supporter of Reuben, was the nominee for vice-president.<sup>4</sup> Reuben was confident of their winning and he could see himself being lifted from humble Bethania to the realms of the capital at Washington.

#### OPPOSED ANDREW JACKSON

He plunged into the fight, bringing his "Big Bertha" to bear on Andrew Jackson, whom he termed an arrogant "Nizy," who butchered the Indians, violated the Constitution, destroyed the United States bank, given to the use of profanity, devoid of all feelings and humanity and a stranger to philanthropy.<sup>5</sup> But Jackson won, despite Wirt, Ellmaker and Chambers, and the latter was greatly disgruntled.

It required as much time to compile the election returns in the gubernatorial campaign in 1832 as it did for the Wickersham committee to report its findings; and the victory of Governor Wolfe further exasperated Chambers.

Harriet Beecher Stowe never portrayed the horrors of slavery as did this man of Bethania. His denunciation of it, and his advocacy of Indian Rights, excited much indignation in the community, and subscribers and readers of his paper wrote him scathing communications, unfit for print and shocking in their vulgarity. Reuben printed them verbatim, and then commented on them in somewhat choicer language but with venom that blistered.

The Palladium published many speeches delivered by Indian chieftains, and their logic and conclusions compared favorably with

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<sup>4</sup> Amos Ellmaker died November 28th, 1851, and is interred in St. James's churchyard, Lancaster, Pa.

<sup>5</sup> October, 19th, 1832.

some of the addresses delivered in the Senate of to-day. But all the while the poor Indian was being moved westward and his land confiscated.

On May 1st, 1834, James Buchanan excited the ire of the Bethania editor by delivering a speech in which he took credit for helping the local laboring man and encouraging him in his efforts to get along.<sup>6</sup> At the very time, the Palladium declared that "Buchanan was in momentary expectancy of the receipt of a large quantity of household furniture purchased in Philadelphia and manufactured by Philadelphia mechanics;" which charge, however, was not of sufficient importance to inject in the presidential campaign when Buchanan ran against Winfield Scott. The furniture, by the way, is yet at "Wheatland."

#### EXCITED BY MACHINERY.

The probability of machinery usurping human power was then exciting the country, "nor are these visionary anticipations.<sup>7</sup> What will the coming century bring forth?" asked Reuben. If he could but have seen developments along these lines!

The building of the Pennsylvania railroad and the digging of the Gap cut were the great doings of that day. Taxpayers were complaining of the great depth of the cut, contractors were bent upon going deeper. Reuben suggested that "members of the Legislature get their heads together to stop digging and contrive some plan for getting the cars upgrade." "The cut" he said, "is destined to be a nuisance in the community."<sup>8</sup>

In that he spoke as a prophet, for in its present condition, with no walls nor supports for the sides and with precipitous banks close to the highway, it is, at least, a menace to life and property.

The number of wheelbarrows and men engaged on the work, and the consumption of whisky on payday, were tabulated.

The Palladium describes the passing through Bethania of 1000 oxen on their way from Chicago to Philadelphia. No work was done while they were passing; every resident wanted to see

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<sup>6</sup> May 23rd, 1834.

<sup>7</sup> January 24th, 1834.

<sup>8</sup> December 20th, 1833.

the great drove of beasts that was soon to be used in farm labor in New Jersey and the eastern counties of Pennsylvania.

But the greatest event in that community, was the arrival of the first passenger train at the Gap from Lancaster, *en route* to Philadelphia. The train consisted of one engine and two coaches containing about fifty passengers.<sup>9</sup> They hoped to reach Philadelphia the same night, and this caused Reuben to indulge in prophecies of future railroad development and the speed of trains.

#### FINED FOR SMOKING.

Men were being fined two dollars in Boston for smoking cigars in the public streets, and this gave encouragement to societies seeking to stop the use of tobacco. A public shooting match, for one pair of oxen and a black bear at a hotel "down Gap way," was denounced; and so were rival newspapers for printing notices of the disgraceful affair.

Take warning! Let there be no further argument as to the official locust year. The Palladium went back to the days of Nero for data, and according to it 1936 will be the year of their visitation.

The following "outrage" was noted as being of then recent occurrence: "The postboy who carries the Lancaster and Philadelphia mail on horseback passed through Bethania. He had on behind another boy, in addition to the mail. The boy behind had a drum and was beating it, and thus seated on old Dobbin, they were cantering along, whip, cut and go. Dobbin was in a lather of sweat and seemed to be tired of his burden and the serenade. The case will be laid before Washington authorities."

The new Columbia bridge was finished July 12th, 1834, and the Philadelphia stage was the first vehicle to cross the mighty structure.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The issue of April 18th, 1834, states that the train passed by the Gap on April 10th.

<sup>10</sup> August 15th, 1834. The Union, a newspaper published in Lancaster, Pa., on Tuesday, July 15th, 1834, contains the following:

"Columbia Bridge. A single floor has been laid on this structure, and on Friday last [July 11th] the stage passed over it for the first time. We learn that the second floor will be put down in a week or two, when the bridge will be declared open to travelers."

It might interest a good many local politicians to read the names of anti-Masonic candidates for county offices; and to note the attitude of their ancestors, away back in the thirties. And in those days some folk were being reminded of the fact that their grand-parents were Tories, and that was a stigma that stuck like wax.

The Palladium furnishes valuable information on counterfeit money. Large amounts were then in circulation and few people were able to recognize it. There were "counterfeit Christians," too, and they circulated at the Strasburg campmeeting, which Reuben denounced.

#### PRESIDENT WAS ATTACKED.

The President of the United States was being denounced as unfit for high executive position. The Governor of this Commonwealth was charged with wrecking the finances of the State. Legislators were regarded as puppets in the hands of a few designing leaders. The United States Senate, which then had as members Webster, Clay, Calhoun, Buchanan, Benton, King, and other names we now revere, was declared to be a scheming crowd, unreliable and not functioning for the country's good. Not much attention was paid to congressmen.

On April 30th, 1833, the mercury stood at 84, the Susquehanna river was so low that cattle were being driven from bank to bank, a sight the oldest inhabitant had never beheld. Wheat, rye and grass were suffering from the awful drought, farmers were greatly discouraged, with no prospects of crop.<sup>11</sup> The cholera was raging and people in every part of the country were dying of the dread disease.

But in the course of time the rains fell, the Susquehanna rose, crops were produced, the farmers' woes vanished, cholera became unknown, and the politicians of 1832 are now regarded as statesmen, and pessimists have become optimists.

Reuben Chambers seems to have had "the courage of his convictions," but evidently he had much of the character of Don

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<sup>11</sup> May 10th, 1833.

Quixote, the famous hero created by Cervantes, in his make-up, and failed in his high endeavors at reform because he, like Quixote, did not learn the lesson that often men accept great truths but slowly. It is easier at times to lead than to drive them.

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## WOODROW WILSON IN LANCASTER

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER.

**D**URING the winter of 1895-6, Dr. Woodrow Wilson, of Princeton University, universally acknowledged as one of the most magnetic speakers in America, delivered six lectures in Lancaster, under the auspices of the local University Extension course, on "Leaders of Political Thought." Tickets for the entire series were one dollar. The lectures were delivered in Maennerchor Hall, 250 North Prince street.

The first lecture was on Thursday evening, November 21st, 1895. The Rev. Charles L. Fry, the scholarly pastor of Trinity Lutheran church, introduced the speaker, in glowing and commendatory terms; and said that the University Extension movement had reached its highest success in securing so able an instructor to present the subject. Professor Wilson held the closest attention of an audience of several hundred people with a brilliant discourse upon the philosophy and character of "Aristotle, the Father of Political Science." The lecture was additionally effective as he spoke without notes, and many bits of keen humor charmed his hearers.<sup>1</sup>

The Daily New Era<sup>2</sup> thus commented on the address:

"To attempt an abstract of the lecture would be futile, as the line of thought which pervaded the whole talk was so skilfully connected, the syllogisms were so pertinently inserted, the logic so smooth, and the conclusions so convincingly drawn, that each division bore a relation so intimate to the ones immediately preceding

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<sup>1</sup> The Daily Examiner, Friday, November 22nd, 1895.

<sup>2</sup> Friday, November 22nd, 1895.