

EARLY ARTS, CUSTOMS AND EXPERIENCES IN RURAL LANCASTER

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TO properly acquire some relative conception of the habits and occupations of old-time people in this county, one should have knowledge of its physical or topographical background, with a general idea of former places and early periods of time.

Prior to the formation of Lancaster county, much of its territory was embraced in Penn's Chester county area. Part of what now is Lancaster city was known as Gibson's Pasture or Hickory Town, prior to over two hundred years ago. East of this central locality, toward the Gap border hills, was called East Conestoga. The opposite direction, toward the "great River" (Susquehanna), was known as West Conestoga.

THE FORERUNNERS

Native Indian tribes were Canestagoes or Conestogas who belonged to the strong Susquehannocks. These warriors were very tall and muscular, many of them being described as from six to seven feet in height. They had a number of camp-sites, some of which were temporary squatting-grounds, in different parts of this fertile county. The last notable village site was at what became known as Indiantown, near present locality of Letort, south-west of Millersville.

These natives lived close to numerous springs of water, particularly south-east and west of Lancaster, where there are frequent evidences in stone, bone and pottery, of their former handicraft, at old places of habitation and burial plots.

White settlers from Europe freely traded with the Conestoga Indians early in the seventeen-hundreds, purchasing or bartering for the better places at springs near slopes, at meadows and water courses. Small patches of soil or fields had been already opened there, and cultivated with Indian corn and other native grains and vegetable growths.

In some cases single-story huts were built, without unusual effort at immediate clearance of trees. In other places the primi-

tive building plans occasioned great toil. These houses were first constructed of logs, with grass and mortar filling the spaces between them. Then some buildings were set up from gathered stone. Afterwards others of these buildings were formed of quarried stone. Later on brick were used which at first were imported from England. Log-built houses were erected for years after the Revolutionary period until early in the nineteenth century.

There are a number of fine old stone and brick houses remaining throughout the county. The oldest native stone structure yet standing is the Christian Herr dwelling, between Willow Street and Beaver Valley pike, not far from Big Spring and the Mennonite graveyard. It was built in 1719. A great wide chimney, with open fire-place, strengthens its centre, while its solid oak stairways are fair specimens of pioneer home workmanship.

Another very old stone house, better built than the Herr dwelling, was the original homê of the Snavely's, near Landis Valley. The date-stone (1728-H I S) shows that the house was built only nine years later than Herr's. This building was improved by Henry and Catherine Landis. Its original stone walls and wood-work are all of massive and lasting character, including doors, hinges, steps, wide floor boards, and interior finishing.

SETTLED BY EUROPEANS

The early settlers included Scotch-Irish along the south-eastern and north-western borders of this county. The Quaker stock was located in the east and in Lancaster borough; the Welsh about Churchtown; the Amish between them toward Lancaster; while the Mennonites were distributed westwardly on both sides of the Conestoga river, bordering on Lancaster and beyond toward the Little Conestoga and Big Chiques creeks.

The Baptists or German Dunkards had an exclusive and rare monastic settlement and cluster of log buildings along the Cocalico at Ephrata. One of the ancient log meeting houses of the Old Mennonites is at Landisville, built about 1742, in which our great-grandparents worshipped. This structure is well-preserved and worthy of observation.

The English emigrants early took advantage of a wonderful start made by the tailing German Swiss population, more particu-

larly in Lancaster, where the town's street names were placed by James Hamilton, an Englishman, and others.

In the valleys of the country districts there was much hard work to be done, summer and winter, in felling great oak, hickory, chestnut and walnut trees. This gathering of hewn lumber for building purposes, furniture and fuel, close at hand, continued for more than one hundred and fifty years.

Men, women and children were robust and happy in their old-time home-making and living habits. They had plenty of good, ordinary, though generally coarse food for sustenance. As a rule their teeth remained sound almost to the end of their allotted years.

Long hours of labor were unfailingly observed and each new day was started early, even before sunrise, so that full measure could be given of workingmen's time and efforts regardless of their pay. Favors were given, otherwise than of money, by landlords or owners of farms and tenant houses.

INDUSTRY AND CUSTOMS

Some country people raised broom-corn in their fields, which was afterward made into brooms for their use and for neighbors. Hemp and hops were raised to quite an extent in Hempfield township prior to 1775 and later; hops were grown to more recent times. At a period as late as the seventies of the past century, home-made molasses was compressed and extracted from sugarcane at Lancaster Junction, south of Sporting Hill.

Woolen goods were woven locally, and grandmothers particularly delighted in knitting woolen stockings from brown, blue and gray material. Rag carpets were produced by country weavers in a number of communities. One of these carpet weavers, Daniel Kern, carried on his trade at Landisville as late as the middle eighties.

Shops became plentiful throughout Lancaster county for constructing wagons and carriages, and the making of barrels, harness, shoes, general household utensils and farming implements. Many examples of these are housed and on exhibition in the Landis Valley Museum.

Distilleries for creating liquor became more or less localized in sections of Lancaster county. One of the nearest and best

known to the writer, was the Jacob Bear place, between Rohrerstown and the Three Mile Tavern, where "J. B. Rye Whiskey" was made as a brand of liquid tonic which received praise by diplomats and notable public figures at the festive councils of Hon. James Buchanan, when he was in the White House at Washington.

A custom, prior to 1870 or a little later, was to have "nine o'clock pieces" served in the farm fields. A "jigger" of whiskey was given as a quencher with fresh water. Boys usually carried some lunch, water and stimulants during the forenoon to hired help, while at their work in hay-making and harvest times.

OCCUPATION OF WOMEN

Women in the early days did all the required sewing, making of dresses, shirts, etc., and mending torn or worn clothes for their families. These groups were quite large, often having from six to ten children, and in some cases from twelve to sixteen or more offspring. There is record of the mother of a family, about fifty years ago, living on the Big Chiques creek between Garber's mill and Sporting Hill, who had fully eighteen children.

Quilting bed-covers resulted in unique and even splendidly designed pieces of domestic needle-work. Among them were some patterns of "crazy," irregularly cut patches which to-day would probably be classed as modernistic. Many examples of the old-time quilting art are among the possessions of local collectors, besides having been purchased for the eastern homes of the ultra wealthy.

Apples and peaches long ago were sliced into small pieces and dried on wooden trays, in the sun, to be put aside for winter use. Cherries were dried in like manner, and afterward stored in home-made sacks or bags placed in upper unoccupied spaces or garrets.

Bread at one time was all home-made once a week, in ovens attached to out-kitchens. Yeast or "sotz" had to be carefully looked after, to keep in good condition for manipulation in baking. Loaves of bread were usually large, equal to two or three of the present five cent kind.

WOODSHEDS AND SPRING HOUSES

Woodsheds long ago were the go-between buildings at rural

farm houses and barns. Those sheds sheltered useful things needed daily by male and female family members. Chunks of wood were cut through, by aid of special framed saws, as worked by both hands in front of or across saw-bucks. The separated pieces of wood were then split and reduced to kindling sizes for burning in stoves.

On rainy days a favorite custom was for children to play in the old woodshed, which afforded them freedom for exercise and fun not always granted in living rooms or kitchens. The gathered walnuts, hickory nuts and shellbarks were cracked and eaten there.

While the woodshed was a storage place for odd tools and small implements, one of its best or worst remembered parts was as a spot where Dad or Pop gave his erring youngsters a "licking." When the weather was not unfavorable, this impromptu switching from a pliable stick, more frequently took effect behind a woodshed, which at least saved the young culprit from sight, and to some extent, other humiliation.

There were numerous old stone spring-houses, prior to the practice of storing ice. These out-lying buildings were sheltered with low-covered roofs. Usually stone steps led down, from entrance, to the clear, cold water within.

These natural wells were and yet are very cool and refreshing coverts, eliminating the use of artificial ice for care of milk, butter and provisions. Numbers of these springs were equipped with, and still have, automatic water-working rams, forcing drinking water to houses and barns on nearby premises.

COUNTRY RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES

The family Bible was always conspicuous on country parlor or spare-room tables. In the well-worn leather-covered book all births, marriages and death records were constantly to be seen, in plain view, by young men callers on fair women members of the household, thus avoiding any camouflaging of ages, etc.

Country courting was indulged in quietly and sweetly by the aid of flickering fat-lamps and candles, or at a later era with coal-oil lampwicks turned low, after the "old folks" retired. When a lover stayed longer than customary, he naturally took care to make no unnecessary noise in his delayed departure.

German religious sects observed set customs of dress among the adults, while their children (which would include certain Menonite and Brethren bodies) were allowed some freedom in social habits before marriage. Awhile ago there was "sinfulness" in whistling or laughing too loudly on the Sabbath, as discountenanced by some of the more rigorous regulated households.

To-day their headgear seems to be the most striking and final surviving emblem of "plain" folk dress habits or customs. Like more modern dresses among the females, the caps are much abbreviated. These head coverings somewhat conform to the shapes of prevailing hat-making modes. This is noticeable among young people.

Rural children had simple toys, mostly of home-made kinds. Rag dolls were the common playthings for girls. Some dolls had names like Jane, Bessie, etc. Boys have always delighted in ball playing, leap-frog, spinning tops, and flying kites. "Shinny" was a common pastime, with elements of risk. Rolling hoops and the playing of marbles came with advent of each spring season and were enjoyed by both sexes.

In the eighteen-thirties and forties horseback riding was greatly in evidence around about Lancaster. It was not unusual for a country couple to ride on family horses to town, there to get married and then lovingly and happily ride back home again. A calithumpian serenade invariably awaited them the same evening, from husky neighbors' boys with "horse-fiddles" and other noise-making devices. There was no termination to the racket made until "all hands" were invited inside for a treat, or a contribution was given them in cash to be spent elsewhere.

PERSONALITIES AND PRACTICES

Each community possessed several more or less outstanding personages, socially, politically and otherwise. Among the old-fashioned country leaders was honest Dave Burkholder, one-time machinist near Bamford, (then known as Independenceville), and later on a Prison Keeper of Lancaster county. He became famous in the eighties for having Bruno, a bloodhound, to help him keep convicts and prisoners within bounds at the local jail.

Some of the rural inhabitants were well-fixed and intelligent,

good neighbors to deal and associate with. One would meet them frequently at the wayside blacksmith shops, country stores and post-offices. Other characters were not so well endowed in material or mind-matter, though interesting withal. You may wish to hear more of the latter.

Much old-fashioned humor was common enough among all classes. To give a "lift" when meeting a body walking along dusty roads away from home, was one of a number of their outstanding virtuous offers, to which we can testify.

"Dooty Fritter," giant tramp, with tightly buttoned long top-coat, silent of speech, turned up one time each winter at its worst, in Salunga. He walked slowly with head down and carried a very long, thick stock for support or to push against snapping dogs. This was in the early seventies. He knew that he could get a good bite of food at a warm fire-side in our home, but scarce a word did he ever utter. Truly he was one of the most uncommon men we ever met, the least obtrusive and still less talkative.

There were many tramps about in those years and they had their separate out-of-the-way hobo "roosts." One of the best sheltered was at Shenck's mill, on the Big Chiques creek. Prior to the close of the Civil War, these traveling gentry were frequently designated as "Dutchmen." Children held them in fear to some extent, although as a rule they were harmless when treated respectfully.

A half century or more ago it was not an uncommon sight for walking peddlers to carry large baskets on top of their heads, women the same as men, with and without aid of their hands. Country women and children delighted to look over an uncovered pack of notions, or manufactured odds and ends, for sale at a trifling sum. As a rule an article was disposed of at each home along the peddler's path of travel.

Revival, or protracted, religious meetings at the beginning of each year, created diversion and no little interest to unconnected attendants. These nightly services lasted from ten days to several weeks. There was generally a "mourners' bench" up front, close to an "amen" corner; and always a lengthy exhortation by some preacher. There was shouting, too, mixed with elements of fear from descriptions of hot fires and brimstone as punishment for the

wicked, unrepentant ones. A few of the older women actually "got happy" during progress of those evening revivals, which we witnessed.

HOMELY GERMAN EXPRESSIONS

Upon questioning us, in Pennsylvania-German, concerning some motive:

"For wass dusht du sell?"

Anglicized as, Why do you do this?

"Du bisht recht und Ich bin au recht."

You are right and so am I right.

"Doe kumt dar aldt Reimeshnyder wid'r."

Here comes old Reimensnyder again.

He was father of the author of "Tillie, a Mennonite Maid." He certainly knew where to get a good Sunday country dinner, in the seventies.

At an up-county funeral, while a large burial casket was about being lowered toward the rough box, which was too small, a minister tried to help out an awkward situation thus, when the sexton droningly began to sing:

"Es iss tsu gross, es gaet net nei,

Es muss ausgnumben waerden."

It is too big, it will not go in,

It must now be taken out.

Fifty years ago this expression was made in East Hempfield township:

"De younga weibsleit sind nima shae midt era dreckich pulw'rd boka."

The young women are no longer pretty with their dirty, powdered cheeks.

To children the night before each Christmas:

"Pok sich ob zu eira bedt, de bellsnikla kuma."

Pack yourselves off to bed, the bellsnickles are coming.

SEVERAL LOCAL APPELLATIONS

There were plenty of names awhile ago peculiar to localities, as these, for instance:

In East Hempfield township there have been spaces or localities designated like—"Buzzards' Glory," "Stony Battery," "Hog Island," "Hans Michel's Loch," and others.

Rohrerstown was one time named Hempfield for its post-office, and Petersburg as East Hempfield (now East Petersburg). Neffsville was called "Fiddler's Green" and later simplified to "Green." Mountville at some period was "Mount Pleasant." "Noodledusie" existed between Neffsville and Petersburg. Florin about fifty years ago was known as Springville. Landisville over a century since was called Centreville.

All over Lancaster county there are villages and localities which have undergone changes of name. Some day it will be difficult to recognize places where progenitors once lived, as numbered on rural postal routes of the latter days.

We have purposely and fairly given some of the quaint and curious names of places, persons, customs and experiences, so that such may not be altogether lost in the hustle of changing affairs in this present generation.

RURAL LIFE A VAST SUBJECT

The whole field of old-time Lancaster county life can only be treated in sections, this particular sketch being one with which we are more or less familiar.

We, who are to the manor born, revere and enjoy the memories of our wholesome past. We are likewise glad to have our outside friends join with us, whether coming from the west, New England or old England (as when the Mayor of the British Red Rose city visited us several years ago in Lancaster), and elsewhere from European and other foreign lands.

Fraternal interests and knowledge of old as well as new habits and surroundings are worth everyone's endeavor. Prevalent customs will especially be bettered thereby. There are yet enough enriching ideals worth noting and promoting in dear old Lancaster town and county, with their common traditions and accumulations of folk-lore. May our community "garden spots" continue to grow and thrive alway!