

Tories at the "Dutch" Mill

BY OLIVER S. SPROUT

As so often happens, under like circumstances, in trying to verify a family tradition, other lesser known facts, of far more general interest, came to light; and the tradition took on a semblance of a factual narrative.

The traditional features, gathered from our mother's scrapbook and dependable historical works, were the subject of a short essay that appeared in Pamphlet No. 4, Vol. XLIII, of this Society issued in 1939, entitled Andrew Snyder, A Revolutionary Soldier. Therefore, this paper is supplementary to the earlier one.

Our clues had all led to the "Dutch" mill, a center of maneuvers for a group of men, the subversive activities of which are closely paralleled by others of today. Such material, then, proved helpful but inconclusive. The ink had barely time to dry on the pamphlet mentioned, when—for us the most fortunate thing happened.

During the late depression years, a group of qualified W.P.A. workers had screened and catalogued an assortment of official documents that had lain for years in boxes and barrels, in the basement of the State Library and Museum, in Harrisburg, in sad disorder.

After this group had completed its work, a native of Lancaster, one Mr. Martin H. Brackbill, who had been born on Nevin street, this city, mulled through those papers and selected enough material to sustain a column in the Harrisburg *Daily Patriot* through two years, 1940-41-42, entitled "Backgrounds of Old Harrisburg and Vicinity." From those articles came some of what we offer as sustaining evidence.

The "Dutch" mill stood about twenty miles from the county seat, near the present site of New Holland, where Mill Creek crosses Old Peter's Road. Originally built, in 1717, by Theodorus Eaby, founder of the prolific Eby-Eaby clan, it passed through several owners' hands, before becoming the property of Michael Rien, in 1760. In 1775 it was the property of Michael's son, George. (This name variously spelled Rhine, Rinne, Rien.)

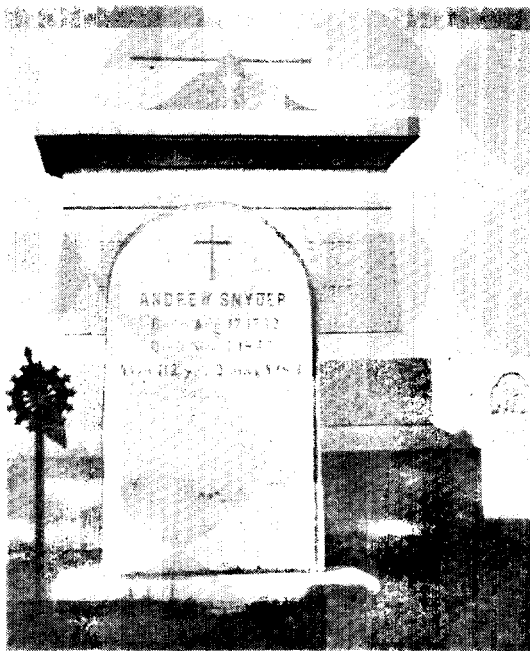
John Rien, brother of George, owned a plantation nearby of one hundred and sixty-eight acres of land, "of middlin' quality."

Associated with the brothers Rien, and probably the wealthiest of the group, was Michael Whitman (Witman), an inn keeper, of Cocalico Township. His hostelry stood at the intersection of two busy roads, now Routes 137 and 148. This placed the tavern close to the Cloisters and the center of the present town of Ephrata.

At that time mills and taverns filled dual roles by serving as social and civic centers, as well as for their intended purposes, while their proprietors often emerged as political leaders thereabouts. Their stations in life probably accounted for both George Rien and Michael Whitman being appointed as members of the Committee of Observation, when the time came that such were needed. It was the duty of such members to seek out and bring to justice all persons trafficking in goods of English origin. Another member of the group, with much less of this world's goods, was Englehart Holtsinger, a blacksmith.

Our great-grandfather, Andrew Snyder, worked in the mill for George Rien. The tradition mentioned tells of how, in the early days of the Revolution, Mr. Snyder discovered that flour from the mill was being sent to the British army and questioned Rien concerning the legality of such actions.

As a result, Snyder and Rien parted company, with Snyder enlisting in Culbertson's Cavalry. He was severely wounded in the arm by a sabre cut (See Pa. Arch. 2nd Series, Vol. X, p. 446.) at the Battle of Germantown; after which he was furloughed at home until fully recovered and then re-entered the service. The Rev. Calvin G. Bachman, of Roland's Reformed



Andrew Snyder
Revolutionary Soldier
August 17, 1733 — November 14, 1845

Church, has told us of flour from that mill, going to the Colonial troops, which was found to contain ground glass.

Events preceding the investigation and exposure of the misconduct of local leaders closely resemble such affairs of today. Apparently there will always be those among us who are very patriotic, until their zeal snarls their purse strings, after which they base decisions upon financial, rather than moral foundations.

It is true that there were extenuating circumstances governing the actions of the people down in Earl Township. Predominately of Swiss or German

origin, they were intensely religious. The hardships they and their forebears had experienced, because of their convictions, being well known, with over thirty thousand of them having come into the Province in search of religious freedom. Between 1727 and 1776, they had been asked to take Oaths of Allegiance to the English Crown. Then, suddenly in 1776, they were being asked to retract those same oaths; and to them oaths were not things to be taken so lightly.

Close to the "Dutch" or "Roland's" mill, as it was later known, is a memorial to their religious sensibilities. This is the "Zeltenreich" or "Roland's" Reformed Church. In the adjacent, immaculate graveyard are many headstones bearing names of families prominent in the early days of the community; also the written, unbroken records of the church dating back to 1746. Among those gravestones is one in memory of the ancestor mentioned.

The diversified, treasonable activities of those congregating in the "Dutch" mill were brought into short focus by the timely discovery of the theft of a bay mare from the stables of Valentine Kinzer, of New Holland, an ancestor of the Hon. J. Roland Kinzer, in January of 1778. From that incident came evidence of duplicity practiced by some in high places, as shown in preserved records. (Pa. Arch., Vol. 3, 2nd Ser. p. 165. Col. Rec., Vol. XII, 1st Ser., pp. 267-268-269.) Such read: "In Lancaster county, it was revealed that the First Agent of Confiscated Properties, a certain Colonel George Stuart, failed to give proper notice as to when sales were to be held, so that the public was not notified. As a result, various persons complained that only friends of the Agent attended the sales, especially that of Michael Whitman, a rich inn-keeper, who had fled to the British. It is charged that at the Whitman sales, valuable articles brought very low prices, and that when persons tried to bid them up, the auctioneer did not hear them."

This man's estate was sold for twenty-five thousand pounds, after being confiscated; while Englehart Holtsinger's effects brought but fifty pounds and six pence. M. Whitman's estate was sold to Michael Diffenderffer, great-grandfather of F. R. Diffenderffer, who read a paper on the subject to this Society on September 4, 1908. On the 6th of May, 1778, the Honorable Timothy Matlack, Secretary of the Executive Council, wrote to Colonel George Stuart, requesting a list of all properties seized and being held for sale. Colonel Stuart replied five days later with a roster of sixteen names, with detailed accounts of their properties.

The crimes for which those sixteen persons were attainted were not mentioned; but other papers in the Archives inform us concerning the crimes of the brothers Rien. This list does not include all of those attainted from this county; just those involved in a series of interlocking crimes. It is surprising, however, how comparatively few there were in the combined lists from this county which, then, covered much more territory than at present.

By the time Colonel George Stuart's list of attainted persons reached the Executive Council, George and John Rien were prisoners of the British in Philadelphia, whence they had fled, since their names had been included in the list mentioned.

The accusations against them came as a result of a preliminary trial held here on February 18, 1778, before William Henry, maker of the famous Henry rifle and the father of Judge John Joseph Henry, one of the first Judges to sit in Dauphin county courts, after that county had been erected from a portion of this one, in 1785.

The trial disclosed that the brothers Rien were implicated in more than the selling of flour to the British. They, too, had been involved in the theft and running of horses from this locality to the British, then in Philadelphia; of which the theft of Valentine Kinzer's horse was a single action.

Most likely Earl Township had been set upon, as a base of operations by the British, because of the reputation of the stock bred there. Not only was the Conestoga wagon a development of the area; but the Conestoga horse, of which Dr. Herbert H. Beck had so entertainingly written, was bred there by a people possessing a knowledge of animal husbandry dating back for thirty generations. Earl Township enjoyed the reputation of having supplied its full quota of men and animals, in 1755, when Benjamin Franklin mustered a force of a wagon train to serve with the ill-fated Braddock expedition; after both Virginia and Maryland had failed most miserably in a like effort.

Photostatic copies of statements made by the men directly involved in the stealing of horses, are signed by Lieutenant Mansin, Wendel Meyer and Joseph Rode. They reveal how some of the local citizens aided in securing and delivering horses to the British, while our own troops were perishing from cold and hunger, at Valley Forge, because supplies could not be delivered to them.

The preliminary trial was held February 2, 1778, with the Court Martial following on February 18. The trio signing the confessions were a strange assortment of humanity, indeed; an army lieutenant, a farm hand and a half-witted boy.

From Lt. Mansin's statement we learn that he had been born in Pruse Menin, Prussia; and that he had left his native land in 1770. He, then, went to London, where he lived for two years before crossing the Atlantic to Philadelphia. There he did work for one Peter Meerkin, a "sugar" baker. Quitting the city he went to Jamaica for a year. From the West Indies he went to Carolina, where for a year and a half he engaged in business on the Catawba River. He remained in South Carolina "until the disturbance there, with the rising of the people," after which he went to Pensacola with John Stuart, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. In Pensacola he got a commission in the Rangers, which he soon sold. He remained in Pensacola until he was able to sail to New York on the British warship, Phoenix, in 1777. At New York he got a Commission in the Queen's Rangers as a lieutenant, and accompanied General Howe, when the latter invaded Pennsylvania.

About ten weeks before the trial, while in Philadelphia, he got acquainted with Englehart Holtsinger (our blacksmith from Earl Township). Mansin had been at General Howe's headquarters, on some business with General Howe and Major Balfour, when Englehart Holtsinger came in, and in the

course of the conversation said that he lived within a short distance of Lancaster.

Major Balfor asked Holtsinger if some good sprightly horses could be obtained in that portion of the county. Holtsinger said he could get some; and it was proposed that Mansin and Holtsinger should set off upon that business; and about two days later they did so, after receiving instructions from Major Balfor to purchase some horses in this part of the county, but not to go over sixteen guineas for a good sprightly horse. Those they got from friends of the government (the English) they were to pay for same; but if any suitable ones were to be found among the rebels (the Colonial patriots), they were just to be taken at any rate (meaning, steal them) and they would be paid for by General Howe.

The pair came into Lancaster County by way of Chester and Darby; stayed at John Rien's for an hour or two, then went to George Rien's from whence Holtsinger went home.

Mansin only admitted having made one trip into Lancaster County, previous to the one which resulted in his capture; but statements of another of the witnesses contradicted that. The fact that Mansin held a commission in the British army, automatically placed him in the category of being a spy, in the event of his capture, which fact bore on his statements.

Mansin's recital of his first trip into Earl Township states that "after spending his first night in Lancaster County at the Dutch mill, the next day he went to Englehart Holtsinger's in the company of Michael Rien, a son of George Rien's; and that Holtsinger went with him to John Rien's; and that John Rien went with him to purchase a horse of one Oberly, a brother-in-law of the said John Rien."

He also asserted that John Rien knew the examinant's business; that the horse was for the use of the enemy; that John Rien told the same to Oberly who sold him, this examinant, the horse for one hundred pounds, Congress money, which was to be paid to John Rien in eight days.

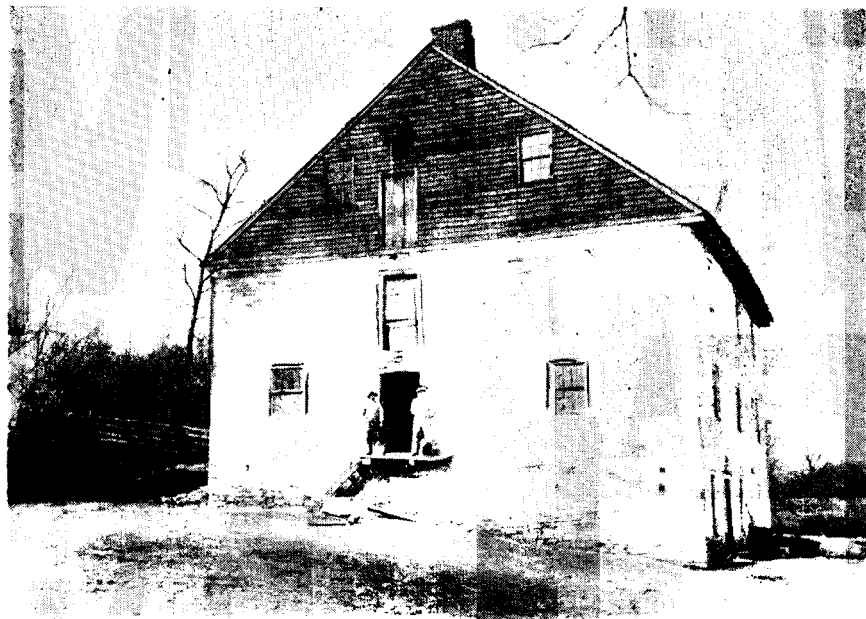
Mansin also said, "he took the horse and put it in the stable of John Rien. The next day he and Holtsinger went to one George Bare, about two miles from Rien's mill, to buy a horse of him. That he did buy a horse from the said George Bare, for twenty-five pounds of "hard money," or English coin; of which the examinant paid him ten pounds, in gold and silver, and the next day sent him, by John Meyer, Wendel's brother, as much hard money as made sixteen pounds and five shillings, and John Meyer brought him the horse."

He stated that John Meyer knew the horse was for the enemy's use, and that the following day, in the afternoon, in company with Wendel Meyer and Joseph Bower, set out for Philadelphia, by the way of the Gap; and called at Welch's Tavern. The host there knew they were going to Philadelphia, and they got there the next day.

Because of the risk they ran of being intercepted by any of the many bands of light horse cavalry, that were patrolling the roads between Valley Forge and the Delaware, Mansin and his companions were only able to take down a few head of stock at any one time; so successive trips had been made.

On one of the following trips the theft of the horse from Kinzer's stable resulted in disaster for Mansin, Meyer and Joseph Rode. And, at the investigation following their capture, yet another phase of anti-governmental activity was revealed.

Mansin stated that on one occasion, when he and three others, Wendel Meyer, Englehart Holtsinger and Joseph Bower, had reached the banks of the Schuylkill River, with horses obtained in Lancaster County, they met with two men who said they, too, lived in Lancaster County, and who had with them one of the Hessian prisoners taken by Colonial troops at Trenton



The Rien's "Dutch" Mill.

at Christmas time of 1776. The name of the one, he thought, was Abraham Bare and the other Abraham Longenecker.

They had left their prisoner with the guard at the Schuylkill River, and they all went together into Philadelphia; stopped at the Sign of the King of Prussia, in Market Street; and from there went to the Sign of the Golden Swan, in Third Street, where they lodged. Wendel Meyer rode one of the horses, staying in Philadelphia for two or three days, after which he returned home. However, he understands that Bower enlisted in the Light Horse; and that Longenecker stayed there and drove team. In about eight days, he, Holtsinger and Abraham Bare returned to get more horses.

His statement continues with: "On a night in January, of 1778, Mansin, Holtsinger and Joseph Rode, a youth employed at John Rien's, started for

Philadelphia. Holtsinger had left Mansin and Joseph Rode, and had gone to the stable of Valentine Kinzer, broken into the stable and stolen the mare." Mansin further stated: "Holtsinger and Joseph Rode had left the examinant waiting in the same place, and went away for some other horses, and, returned in about a half hour with two horses they said they had taken from the stable of one Martin, a Whig, and a captain in the militia." (Alexander Martin was also a member of the Committee of Observation.)

Then, the examinant, with Holtsinger, Meyer and Joseph Rode, proceeded with the four horses and the bay mare towards Philadelphia. That night they reached Herschberger's Tavern, in Chester County, where they stayed all night. The host and Holtsinger had a good deal of private conversation; but he, Mansin, did not know that Herschberger knew their business. (We have not been able to definitely locate this tavern. Page 1035, Ellis and Evans, History of Lancaster County, gives us this, "The hotel of Hope Herschberger is worthy of mention as one of the most convenient and pleasant hotel buildings between Philadelphia and Lancaster. It was built by J. C. Dickinson in 1854." Since Christiana had experienced a shift of location, after the railroad came through, it is possible that the original place had suffered thereby, and moved to a new location, by reason of lost patronage.)

The next day they went to Welch's Tavern, arrived there about twelve o'clock and put up the horses; and about one o'clock they were apprehended by Valentine Kinzer and his brother. Mansin closed his statement by saying that Welch, the tavern keeper, knew they were taking the horses for the enemy's use; and that Bare, whom he had seen at the Schuylkill with the Hessian prisoner, had said that he lived between Reamstown and Dunkertown (Ephrata). (Welch's Tavern stood between Kenneth Square and Chadd's Ford. H. S. Canby in his "Brandywine" mentions it as a rendezvous for the British during the Battle of the Brandywine; September 11, 1777.)

In the struggle that took place at Welch's Tavern, when Valentine Kinzer and his friends caught up with Mansin and his confederates, Englehart Holtsinger disappears from the story. Whether he was slain, or managed to make good his escape, is not indicated by available records.

Mansin, Meyer and Joseph Rode were tried and sentenced to the gallows; but the entire proceedings were set aside by General Washington upon his reviewing the case, previous to placing his name to the death warrants. Washington's reasons for annulling the findings of the first trial gives us an insight into his character. He wrote: "There is no authority vested in any other hands than those of the Commander-in-Chief, or the Commanding General or any particular State, to appoint a Court Martial. I send you, herewith, an order for constituting a Court Martial, but for the purpose of the trial of these criminals, and others that may be brought before it." Evidently someone had overstepped his authority and had to be placed in his proper station by the Commander-in-Chief.

There was a second trial; the three men were again condemned to death, but General Washington pardoned Joseph Rode, as evidence produced at the

second trial indicated that Rode was a lad with a weak mind, and one evidently influenced by his evil companions. Mansin and Meyer were hanged in the old jail yard at Prince and Water Streets.

This second trial set off a chain of related events that disclosed many trusted officials engaged in treasonable activities; fanning out from the "Dutch" mill. A paragraph in the Colonial Records states: "The mill was bought in by Colonel James Crawford, at the time of the sale on August twenty-fifth, 1778; when it was sold by George Stuart, Agent for confiscated property, for thirty thousand pounds." (Inflation?)

John Rein's property was sold to Mr. Charles Lyng, for twenty-two thousand pounds. (Wendel Meyer had mentioned Charles Lyng as living in Philadelphia.)

Other documents state: "In 1780 the authorities were led to believe that Rein's mill, in Lancaster County; along with Newport, Delaware, were important stations in an underground system by which flour and supplies were being sent to the British, then in New York, from Lancaster County."

William Atlee, prominent local patriot, wrote to Mr. Joseph Reed, President of the Executive Council of the State, on March 8, 1780: "As to the traffic at Rien's mill, *I have had hints, for sometime past, that a quantity of flour had been taken thence to Newport, and had mentioned it to Chief Justice McKean, with the suspicion that it was intended for the enemy; and, as he, in my opinion, was well acquainted with that part of the country [McKean having come from Delaware], proposed that he should have some trustworthy person there have an eye on the flour, which is stored with one Allen, at that place.*" (Had the *hints* referred to by Mr. Atlee originated with Andrew Snyder? We like to think they did.)

Continuing, Mr. Atlee states: "The mill, Rien's, is at a considerable distance from Lancaster, and one of the persons you supposed to be concerned, to wit, Mr. Crawford, is one person I should have at least suspected, and should have requested him to attend to the matter of what is going on at the mill, as he was a colonel in the militia, and, I thought, a steady honest Whig; but I shall now say nothing to him about the matter, and shall give every attention in my power to what is going on there."

Meanwhile, Michael Whitman had returned to this area, been apprehended and sentenced to death; only to be saved by the dramatic last minute arrival of the Rev. Peter Miller, with a reprieve from General Washington, to whom the Rev. Mr. Miller had made personal intercession.

John Rien, the first of the brothers to return, hid out among friends and relations, while Miller tried to perform similar service for him as had been done for Whitman. A petition in Rien's behalf had been prepared and circulated, throughout the section, which was signed by many prominent citizens, including George Ross, signer of the Declaration of Independence.

The Rev. Mr. Miller's enthusiasm in the matter caused Mr. Timothy Matlack, Secretary of the Executive Council, to rebuke the minister, after Mr. Matlack had received a letter from Miller addressed to the Honorable Wm. Atlee in 1781 in this manner:

"My knowledge of your character and conduct leaves me no doubt as to the righteousness of your intention in this business; had it been otherwise a very strong suspicion, to your disadvantage, would have certainly arisen from your letter. If Rien is in your county, it is the duty of those who know where he is to serve notice on the Sheriff; and it is the duty of the Sheriff to immediately arrest and confine him."

Some also think Rev. Mr. Miller interceded in behalf of Mansin and Meyer, but we have been unable to find documentary proof of such actions.

With the return of peace to the country, prosecutions stopped, mainly by reason of the sheer exhaustion of our local patriots.

George Rien returned and regained possession of the "Dutch" mill. Mr. Snyder returned to resume his former employment at the mill and to marry a girl, Magdalena Pieffer, who lived in the Rien household.

The mill that 'Dorst Eby first built had been a log affair. After the war, a son of George Rien razed that structure and erected a more durable and useful building. Drawing from the diary of one who had visited the mill in 1918, and before it was destroyed by fire in 1923, we read, "When we visited the mill, in 1918, the gable end had D. and M. Rien's name on it, with the date 1793. It was still in use, and the old miller showed us all over the mill. He, too told us that, as a lad, he had often heard his father tell of the old Revolutionary soldier who had worked there. [Mr. Snyder died in 1845, aged 112 years.] He showed us the great water wheel and said it was the original wheel, still used to grind corn; but, that other rollers had been put in to grind flour. He showed us many utensils that had been used in the original mill, along with the original scales. He said, too, that the original mill had been built of logs, and that some of the original machinery used in that mill had been installed in the stone mill."

May the pattern of this program of reconciliation and rebuilding for posterity be repeated when Peace is again returned to our land; while we dedicate ourselves to remain on guard against destruction in the fires of Communism. This will be entirely possible, if we do not neglect our splendid heritage, assume a supine attitude, and sit with folded hands, saying, "Things have always worked out for the best, and will probably do so now."