Old Testament Place Names in Lancaster County

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Hebrew Scripture appeals as no other piece of literature to the better nature of man. It speaks to him of his deep and unquenchable passion for justice, his dream of human brotherhood and peace, his need for faith in the Power or Force responsible both for the wonders and beauties of nature and the moral order of the Universe.

The Founding Fathers of communities in Lancaster County, as the Founding Fathers of our Country at large, accordingly cherished the Bible as a guide in their search for equal rights and justice, and especially freedom to worship God as they had learned to worship Him in the privacy of their homes and houses of worship.

Giving Scriptural names to their homes and church communities served in a way to symbolize the attachment our County founders felt for the liberty they were helping to proclaim in all the land.

Thus, one place our county pioneers called **Goshen**, land of plenty to which God had led them. Another place they called **Bethel**, House of God, wherein they could freely pour out their hearts in thanks and praise and petition. Still another they named **Mount Nebo**, mountain peak with an all-embracing view of their new Land of Promise. Another, **Elim**, place of rest in the shade of one's tree with none to make man afraid. Still another, **Eden**, new garden home of delight planted by them in partnership with God; yet another, **Ephrata**, shrine of freedom paid for by the labors of pioneer men and women, patriarchs and matriarchs of God's newly chosen people planted in the New Zion he had appointed for them. In this same spirit, one, John Patton, gave the name **Judea** to the hill plantation straddling West Hempfield and Manor Townships on the banks of the Susquehanna, between Columbia Borough on the north and Washington Borough on the south, and warranted to him in 1774.

I dare say that where Lancaster County settlers chose Biblical names for their communities, they did so in the spirit of the Pilgrim Fathers before them, as a way of expressing thanks to God for leading them safely to these shores of freedom; as a way of affirming faith that unless God build a house of liberty, they labor in vain that build it; and as a way of making a promise to labor mightily to preserve that freedom and bequeath it unsullied to their descendants.

Studying Old Testament place names in our own County of Lancaster can be patriotically stirring, morally elevating, and spiritually rewarding.

ADAMS-MUSSERTOWN

Adam—"Red earth."

"And God created man (Heb. Ha-a-dam) in his image." Genesis 1:27.

Lancaster Post Office, 17602

The name **Adams-Mussertown** was formed from the combined city areas of Adamstown and Mussertown and came into usage in 1957, when the Lancaster Redevelopment Authority was incorporated.

Adamstown is situated on a 15 acre plot along John, Church, and Rockland Streets. It was purchased and named, in 1744, by Adam Simon Kuhn, a practicing physician who had settled in Lancaster, in 1740, and resided on West King Street.

Mussertown is located on land adjoining Adamstown between Howard and East King Streets. It was laid out by Hans Musser, the original owner of Adam Kuhn's property, soon after the formation of Adamstown.

ADAMSTOWN, 19501

Named originally Adamsburg by William Addams, the elder, a man of English descent who laid out the town, in 1761, on the site of an Indian Village. The name was later changed to Adamstown.

Jane Addams, famed founder of Hull House in Chicago, was a direct descendant of William Addams.

The town boasts the largest factory in the world for the making of wool felt hats.

BETHEL

Beth-el—"House of God."

"Jacob said . . . 'This is none other than the abode of God.' . . . He named that site Bethel." Genesis 28:16, 17, 19.

Fulton Township

Quarryville Post Office, 17566

Named after the Bethel (Methodist Episcopal) Church built, in 1822, on farmland given in 1814 to the newly-formed congregation by Bible student Joseph Swift, in whose house the church organization had been holding its foundation meetings.

In this house, incidentally, built in the 1730's, was born on November 14, 1765, Robert Fulton, developer of the principle of steam navigation and designer of the Clermont. Purchased in 1766 by the Swift family from the inventor's father, the church born in it was the first Methodist Congregation to be founded in Southern Lancaster County.

Soon after the Church was built, Swift erected in the area a school for young girls, thus, stimulating the quick formation there of a village of five or six houses. It is from the sacred building in its midst that the village borrowed the designation, Bethel.

CAINS

Cain—"Acquire."

"Now the man knew his wife Eve and she conceived and bare Cain, saying, 'I have gained a male child with the help of God.'" Genesis 4:1.

Salisbury Township.

Gap Post Office, 17527

Named for postmaster John Cains, appointed January 5, 1828. The log cabin in which the Post Office was located is still standing. Its logs, however, are all now covered.

EDEN

Eden—"Luxury," "dainty" or "delight." The term is used in Scripture as a simile of fertility.

"The Lord planted a garden in Eden . . . and placed there the man whom he had formed. And from the ground the Lord caused to grow every tree that was pleasant to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden." Genesis 2:8,9.

Manheim Township.

Lancaster Post Office, 17601

All efforts to find the names of the founders of Eden Village or any documented statement explaining the choice of the name have failed. All we have been able definitely to learn is that there was a Post Office established in Eden Village on May 14, 1850, and named Binkley's Bridge. Binkley's Bridge was changed to Eden Village on August 5, 1853, with Emanuel Van Kannor as Postmaster. The Eden Village Post Office was discontinued on September 20, 1854.

We can only conjecture that the founders chose the name Eden to indicate that they found their site a delightful place to live in, and, to attract additional settlers.

EDEN HEIGHTS

Manheim Township.

Lancaster Post Office, 17601

Named in 1954, by Alvin B. Zarker, developer, by reason of the fact that the area adjoins both Eden Village and Country Club Heights.

EDEN MANOR

Lancaster Post Office, 17601

Built, in 1958, by Builders Development and Service Company of Philadelphia through subsidiary agency, Eden Manor Development Corporation, both represented by Michael Kane of Philadelphia. From him we learn that the name "Eden" was chosen because the project fronted on Pitney Road, an extension of Eden Road; and the name "Manor," chosen

because there was a "Manor House" on the land at purchase time. The name "Manor" was deemed apt by the developers because of its connotation as "a habitation held by tenants" or "a village."

EDEN TOWNSHIP

Secretary's Address—Quarryville, 17566

Organized, in 1855, and seemingly named after the Mount Eden Furnace which had entered somewhat importantly into the industrial economy of the region.

Mount Eden Furnace was located near the west branch of the Octoraro Creek, about a mile north of the Great Valley Road. It was built in 1812, by George Michael and John Withers but has been out of blast since 1843.

It is fair to assume that the name Mount Eden was adopted either by the early settlers of the locale or by the builders of the Furnace as an advertising medium to attract newcomers to the highly productive agricultural area. As is known, the principal business in those days of the people of Lancaster County was farming. All the cereals and most of the fruit grown in this latitude were produced there, including tobacco.

EDEN WEST

Manheim Township

Lancaster Post Office, 17601

Founded, in 1917, by C. A. B. Zook, Eden West consists of a triangle of three avenues west of 1700 New Holland Pike: Linden, Sycamore and Oak.

ELIM

Elim—"Terebinth"

"And they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees: And they encamped there beside the water." Exodus 2:8,9.

Little Britain Township

Peach Bottom Post Office, 17563

Founded on the land of J. Franklin Paxson, Esq. (died in 1892) and developed through his enterprise and business ability. The Paxsons, incidentally, who came to America in 1682, traced their ancestry from the 600's through Ireland, Wales and Scotland to the England of 1250. The name **Elim** was suggested by Dr. Edward Chandlee, a young physician from Philadelphia, who had come here for recuperation from illness and had so well recovered he termed it place like unto Elim, the Oasis where the children of Israel, soon after their flight from Egypt, found twelve shaded, strength-restoring wells.

Tradition has it that Dr. Chandlee further found the name **Elim** appropriate because he found that this pleasant little spot in Little Britain Township had, almost like the Biblical **Elim**, seven wells and seven palm trees. The seven wells, it appears are authentic, but the seven palm trees obviously have to be interpreted as either apocryphal or as simply "trees." Tradition also has it that the suggestion of Dr. Chandlee was made by him within a circle of cronies diverting themselves by conversation around the iron stove of a store he and William Paxson (died in 1860), older brother of J. Franklin Paxson, started, presumably in the middle of the nineteenth century, and which eventually passed to Albert H. Brown, a descendant of Jeremiah Brown who in 1700 named the village of Goshen in Fulton Township and whose family settled in Chester in 1640 and was known to William Penn.

ELIZABETH FURNACE

Elizabeth—Septuagint translation of **Elisheba** meaning "to God is the oath" or "who swears by God", i.e., worshipper of God. [See Isaiah 19:18—"In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt which speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts."]

"Aaron took to wife Elisheba." Exodus 6:23.

Elizabeth Township.

Lititz Post Office.

This small community of five families took its designation from the foundry-furnace bought in 1757 by "Baron" Henry William Stiegel from his father-in-law, John Jacob Huber, and named by Stiegel in honor of his wife Elizabeth whom he married in 1752.

John Huber, iron-master, had been so proud of his iron-refining furnace, the first to be built in Lancaster County, that he placed on its stack a large stone bearing the self-laudatory legend:

> **Johann Huber der erste Deutsche Mann**
> **Der Eisenwerk follfueren kann.**
> John Huber, the first German
> To follow the role of iron-work man.

"Baron" Stiegel was the maker of the famous "Stiegel Glass" and a manufacturer of ten-plate wood stoves.
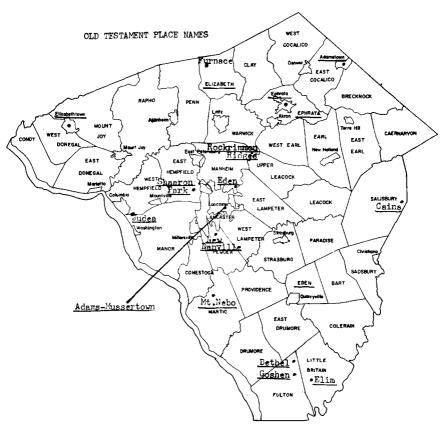

ELIZABETH TOWNSHIP

Secretary's address—Lititz, 17543.

Organized in 1757 and named by "Baron" Henry William Stiegel in honor of his first wife, Elizabeth. Elizabeth's father, John Jacob Huber, was the first settler in the area.

ELIZABETHTOWN

Elizabethtown Post Office, 17022

When white men in the early !720's first set foot upon this part of

Penn's Woods, the locale was all virgin forest. Finding it a "beautiful place" and an "ideal location" for a trading post, the pioneers called it by the corresponding Indian name of **Peshtauk**. The spot, at the same **time**, appeared to the colonists to be also a potential way station along the well-traveled Indian trails going through the area.

Thomas Harris, frontiersman who later became a captain of a company of Rangers, accordingly warranted some of the land on the west side of Conoy Creek, in 1727, and proceeded to establish a trading post and store. In 1730, he built a tavern of log structure to care for white travelers and serve as headquarters for Indian traders.

Harris' tavern called "Bear Tavern" was the first to be established in this section of Penn's Woods. It was abandoned as a tavern in 1744 and converted into a "smithy shop." [Being sturdily constructed the shop stood as such till 1835.] A more substantial and elaborate structure was erected in that same year of 1744, a few feet north of the original tavern. The walls of this latter tavern are intact today, and, are expected to stand for at least another century.

The trails converging upon the Peshtauk Trading Post and Tavern became, in 1731, the main route of the Paxtang-Conestoga "Great Road," later termed the Harrisburg-Lancaster Turnpike.

Harris received the patent for his land, in 1746, and three years later sold it all to another veteran Indian trader, Lazarous Lowery, who in turn, rented the Bear Tavern, in 1750, to Captain Barnabas Hughes for the operation in it of what became the largest fur-trading post between Harrisburg and Philadelphia.

Hughes evidently did a very flourishing business and consequently even before a year was up, bought the Tavern and the whole Harris tract from the Lowerys. The following year, 1751, he laid out a town on the Peshtauk site, changing its name to Elizabeth in honor of his wife.

On April 13, 1827, on petition of a majority of the Elizabeth townsfolk, the State Legislature passed "An Act to erect the town of Elizabethtown in the County of Lancaster, into a borough, which shall be called the Borough of Elizabethtown."

EPHRATA

Ephrath—From Hebrew root meaning "to bear", "be fruitful."

"May ye prosper in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem." Ruth 4:11.

Named by Conrad Beissel, forty-seven year old former baker and Tunker, born in the Palatinate, Germany, but driven thence by persecution. Ephrata is another name for Bethlehem and is the place where Rachel, the matriarch, died (Genesis 35:19).

Beissel observed the Seventh Day as the true Sabbath and practiced a celibate, monastic life. During the seven-year period from 1731 to 1738, he lived a life of seclusion on the banks of the Cocalico Creek. According to his personal assertion, he addressed himself there in mystical fashion to the virgin Sophia, personification of wisdom, in the same sense as Jacob, the Patriarch, labored for seven years to win the hand of Rachel. Hence, the early name of Ephrata, **Parthenopolis,** from the Greek word for virgin, **parthenos.** These seven odd years that Beissel served the virgin goddess, Sophia, in voluntary solitude, were filled with distress. He painfully denied himself the pleasures of life and endured poverty. He suffered the agony of discord among his followers; and had to fight the materialistic profit-making financial activities of some of his conventuals, as well as their rivalry with him for power. He also had to contend with neighbors who, out of bigotry, attempted to burn his settlement to the ground. His comunity was thus built out of the soil of suffering "and endured," as he would have said, "in the conscience for the sake of God's kingdom."

Hence, it is written in the **Chronicon Ephratense**, Ephrata Chronicle, "The name Ephrata was given to the settlement [in 1738] by the Superintendent [Johann Conrad Beissel] of which he said, that here his Rachel [Sophia, virgin goddess of wisdom] for whom he had served [in voluntary solitude] so many years, was buried, after she had born to him Benoni, the child of anguish [i.e., Partheonpolis, the religious poverty-assuming community on the banks of the Cocalico], whereby he pointed to the history of the Patriarch Jacob." The matriarch Rachel, the Bible tells us, on giving birth to her second son some distance short of Ephrath, named him Ben-oni, son of my suffering [or strength], but his father called him Benjamin ["son of the right hand," or "son of the south"]. Thus Rachel died. She was buried on the road to Ephrath—now Bethlehem, (Genesis 35:18, 19).

EPHRATA TOWNSHIP

Secretary's Address—Lincoln, 17542

Erected in 1838 and named by settlers who lived in or near that part of the town of Ephrata known locally as Old Ephrata.

GOSHEN

Goshen—Derived from **geshem** meaning rain.

"We have come, they said to Pharoah, to sojourn in this land . . . the famine being severe in the land of Canaan. Pray, then, let your servants stay in the region of Goshen." Genesis 47:4.

Fulton Township.

Peach Bottom Post Office, 17563

Named around the year 1700 by Jeremiah Brown whose forbears came to America from England. Brown found the spot to be a "land of milk and honey, fruitful and fertile" even as Jacob and his sons found Goshen "The best of all the land of Egypt." (Genesis 45:19).

To this day when one gazes down from the gently rolling hilltops in the area and views the broad fields of grain and the meadows dotted with hundreds of milk-furnishing-kine all around, one appreciates the appropriateness of the name Goshen.

MOUNT NEBO

Nebo—Nebo in the cognate language of Arabic signifies "height."

"That very day the Lord spoke to Moses: Ascend these heights of Abarim to Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab facing Jericho, and view the land of Canaan which I am giving the Israelites as their holding." Deuteronomy 32:48-49.

Martic Township.

Pequea Post Office, 17565

Mount Nebo is in the midst of a region noted for the beauty of its landscape. It took its name from the fact that from Armstrong Hill which

is a little to the East of the village, and which is the highest point in the County, one gets, as one looks North, a bird's-eye view of hills and dales, farmhouses, groves, grainfields, orchards and pastures. As one looks to the Northwest, one can see the Susquehanna River below flowing along its sloping wooded banks, a sight reminiscent, to the first settlers of the place, of the grandness of the view Moses enjoyed as he stood on the summit of Mount Nebo in the Land of Moab and looked westward to the Jordan River and the Promised Land beyond it.

NEW DANVILLE

Dan—"Judge."

**"Dan shall govern his people
At one with the tribes of Israel." Genesis 49:16.**

Pequea Township.

Lancaster Post Office, 17603

All efforts to learn the names of the founders of New Danville and find any documented statement explaining the choice of the name have failed. All we have as explanation for the naming are two alternative unverified beliefs:

1. Many people living there bore the name Daniel.
2. It was founded by a man named Daniels.

A post office was established at New Danville on January 28, 1856, with John Conrad as Postmaster. The Post Office was discontinued on November 9, 1860 but re-established on July 14, 1868, with Postmaster Conrad reappointed by the government. The Office was still in existence in 1929.

ROCKRIMMON RIDGES

Rimmon—"Pomegranate."

"Then the whole congregation sent word to the Benjaminites who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them." Judges 21:13.

Manheim Township.

Leola Post Office, 17540

Named in 1955 by Edmund J. Scanlan, founder of the development, to reflect the geologico-topographical character of the area — ridges rimmed with rocks — a condition reminding Mr. Scanlan of a street he knew in Stamford, Connecticut, where the Scanlans resided prior to settling in Lancaster County, called Rockrimmon Road.

SHAARON PARK

Sharon—"Plain Country."

"I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley." Song 2:1.

East Hempfield Township.

Lancaster Post Office, 17601

Named in 1956, by realtor Abram D. Mellinger, purchaser and developer of the project, after Sharon, the twelve-year-old daughter of his salesman, Edward Kirchner. For the sake of variety, Mr. Mellinger added an extra "a" to the name Sharon, spelling it **Shaaron.**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rabbi Samson A. Shain, spiritual leader of Lancaster Reform Congregation Shaarai Shomayim, was graduated from Boston Hebrew Teachers College, Harvard University, and Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion. He is a chaplain with the rank of lieutenant colonel in the U. S. Air Force Reserve, and is a member of the Lancaster Torch Club, Rotary, and the executive committee of the Lancaster County Community Council. He is also president of the Lancaster Chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. "Old Testament Place Names of Lancaster County" is a chapter in a book Dr. Shain is writing, **"Old Testament Place Names in Pennsylvania."**