

AN ASTOR IN LANCASTER COUNTY.

Many years since a German family, consisting of a man by the name of Fessler, his wife, and two children, named Jacob and Susan, drifted into Bainbridge, where they located, but no one knew from whence they came. They located in a small stone house, which was standing a few years since, at the extreme Northern end of one of the village streets. The husband appeared to be without trade or occupation. The wife was a practical spinner, but did not seem to use her abilities; in fact, the family was shiftless. The son was simple-minded.

Between 1830 and 1840, it is claimed, while Mrs. Fessler, with a lighted candle, was hunting for her bottle of spirits hid among some tow in her low garret, the spinning material was suddenly ignited and she was burnt to death. She was buried in a small old-time burying ground about one-fourth of a mile north of Bainbridge. What became of her husband is not known. This Mrs. Fessler claimed she was a sister of John Jacob Astor, the New York millionaire.

There also resided in Bainbridge at the same time Yorick Sherer, who died shortly prior to 1878. He came from Baden, and claimed that he knew Mr. Astor in the old country, as well as the Fessler family, and, as he re-

lated later in life, after consulting my grandfather, Henry Haldeman (1787-1849), from his desire to assist the Fessler's in their poverty and also to renew his acquaintance with Mr. Astor, he made a trip to New York, traveling on foot. Upon arriving there he hunted up Mr. Astor, but that gentleman refused to recognize him or admit the sister's claimed relationship. Sherer, thoroughly angered and indignant at Mr. Astor's actions, as he stated, freely expressed his views to the latter on his treatment and then returned to Bainbridge, where he repeated his story. Shortly afterwards, however, a regular annuity was received by my grandfather from Mr. Astor to be paid to Mrs. Fessler, which was continued for some years.

After the death of Mrs. Fessler, Mr. Astor sent for the daughter, Susan, to come to New York to be educated. A Mr. Crider, a farmer near Bainbridge, took charge of her to Philadelphia, from where he sent her to New York. Rumor claims she soon tired of her new life and remained but a short time. What became of her was never learned here.

The son, Jacob, for years after his mother's death, wandered around the neighborhood. He lived one entire season under the roots of an overturned tree along the banks of the Susquehanna near my grandfather's residence at Locust Grove, and died there. He was buried midway between Locust Grove and the Haldeman lime kilns, a short distance below.

The late John Wiley, who owned and resided at Locust Grove in later years, was familiar with many of these circumstances. Having heard

his father, John Wiley, relate the same, to whom Mr. Sherer had described his New York journey, desiring to confirm the details, wrote to my uncle, the late Prof. S. S. Halde-
man (1812-1880), my grandfather's eldest child, and received the following reply:

"Chickies, Lan'r Co., Pa.,

"28 May, 1868

"John Wiley, Esq'r,

"Dear Sir:

"Upon returning from Philadelphia I find your letter of the 13th inst. Your impressions about the Fesslers are correct, although I do not recollect the fact you mention about the eagle. They had two children, Jacob and Susan. Mrs. Fessler was burnt to death. She was an Astor, or, as she pronounced it in Pennsylvania-German 'Ashtor.' She was proud of her dignity and would assert it by saying: 'Ich will dich wisse' lasse das ich ein Ashtor bin!' (I will let you know I am an Astor.)

"My father paid her annuity from Mr. Astor, her brother. The family was improvident and not up to the level of the ordinary German population.

"My mother's piano was made by Astor, of London, a brother of the New York Astor.

"Yours truly,

"S. S. HALDEMAN."

The eagle's nest referred to was on a tall tree near my grandfather's residence, and it is said the simple-minded son, Jacob, shot the eagle which had its nest there, making my grandfather very angry.

Prof. Haldeman was very careful

in his statements and never put anything in writing unless positive of all the facts. I had the same information from my father, Cyrus S. Haldeman (1825-1892), who attended to my grandfather's business affairs and was his executor.

Author: Haldeman, Horace L.

Title: An Astor in Lancaster County / by Horace L. Haldeman.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Fessler family.
Astor, John Jacob, 1763-1848.
Scherer, Yorick.
Bainbridge (Pa.)--History.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1914

Description: 5-8 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 18,
no. 1

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.18

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

+++++

Institution Name
Institution Address
Institution Phone Number
Institution E-mail Address