

STIEGEL'S LIFE AND LEGENDS

A recently-published volume, entitled "Stiegel Glass," of which Frederick William Hunter is the author, may not be the "Last Word About Stiegel," but it is certainly the latest and most authoritative revision of the story of that romantic and picturesque figure in the Colonial and Revolutionary periods of Lancaster county history and in the incipient stages of its industrial development. The book is sumptuously and expensively printed, in limited edition, and will likely find its way mostly to the shelves of public libraries and private collectors. This may be accepted as an excuse for briefly reviewing its contents and value here. Moreover, many of those who have heretofore written of this subject—and some of us who have casually contributed to its discussion through the published transactions of this society—have been, perhaps, too ready to accept and perpetuate popular and unsupported tradition for fact. Without the facilities at hand, which Mr. Hunter seems to have exhausted, for a thorough study of the man and his works, and without the time and opportunity he has had to examine, weigh and pass upon original documents and records, we have allowed figments and fiction to become imbedded in what ought to be accurate historical narrative, and the earlier the corrections are made the better we serve the purposes of this society.

Apart from the fact that Stiegel's greatest activities were exerted in our county, the authorship and patronage of this book have a local interest. Its

author, Frederick William Hunter, tells us at the outset that he is descended on the paternal side from the Berks county iron masters of his name, and his mother's ancestors were Lutheran clergymen of Eastern Pennsylvania; either incident would tend to stimulate a study of Stiegel. Mr. Hunter may be further identified by some of our members as the son of Jacob F. Hunter, a cousin of that Frederick Hunter whose widow became the second wife of Rev. Dr. E. V. Gerhart, and whose daughters were well known in Lancaster society forty years ago. A sister of Mr. Hunter, lately deceased, married J. B. Kerfoot, formerly of Chicago, now, like Mr. Hunter, resident of New York. He was a descendant of the well-known Kerfoot family of Lancaster, of which one branch achieved fame and fortune in Chicago. To Mr. Kerfoot the author makes acknowledgment of invaluable aid in preparing and publishing the book.

Long time a collector of Chinese glass, Mr. Hunter's submerged attention to and knowledge of Stiegel glass was awakened so late as 1911 by automobile trips through upper Lancaster county—especially to and in the vicinity of Elizabeth Furnace and Mannheim—where he was frequently offered for sale bits of the genuine Stiegel glass, as well as many specimens mistakenly identified. A determination to explore the history and processes, the varieties, shapes, colors, origin, handicraft and values of the Stiegel glass, suggested to Mr. Hunter the necessity of studying the history of the man Stiegel himself, and of disentangling the thread of his life's story from the tangled mass of exaggeration, romance, tradition and fiction in which it had become enmeshed. His work, therefore, divides

itself into two parts; and, while the personal narrative has the greater relevancy to the purposes of this paper, the elaborate catalogues of the glass itself, the story of Mr. Hunter's own collection presented to the Metropolitan Museum, the magnificent twelve plates in color and one hundred and fifty-nine half-tones which adorn this book, the appendices, with their lists of employes and artisans, their wages and duties, the briefs of title and other authentic data not only help to comprise a monumental work of technical and artistic interest, but by far the most elaborate chronicle of any industry that ever flourished in our local history.

At the outset Mr. Hunter evidently procured, consulted and studied every accessible published work that related, even remotely, to his subject. These histories, sketches, pamphlets, &c., number nearly fifty. Even the most superficial of them is treated with good-natured tolerance; and the freedom from asperity, with which the author disperses some of the hoary traditions, and dispels many misty illusions, is one of the best characteristics of his style.

Without doing violence to copyrighted privileges, or injustice to the author's private property, I may venture to say that his work satisfies me that he is correct in certain conclusions, about which there has been much popular misapprehension and possibly some personal misstatement.

First—Stiegel was not a baron, a nobleman nor of a noble family within the meaning of those terms in Germany at the time of his emigration. He was born at Cologne—not Mannheim—May 13, 1729; eldest of a family of six children. His father died June 22, 1741.

“Heinrich Wil Stiegel,” as he sub-

porarily resided in the city from time to time.

Sixth—The Stedmans, who joined him in the Elizabeth operation, were agents for the ship line on which Stiegel came to America.

Seventh—He married Elizabeth Holtz, October 24, 1758, eight months after the death of his first wife and the birth of their second daughter.

Eighth—At the beginning the Stiegel-Stedman operations of Elizabeth and Charming Force were profitable; their activities led to the acquisition of large land holdings, running up to an acreage exceeding 10,000. The future site of the town of Mannheim was first purchased independently by the Stedmans—not by Stiegel, who “bought in” soon after.

Ninth—Stiegel had artistic tastes and temperament, and inventive genius as well as business energy and vision. He improved the Franklin stove and devised the six and ten-plate. His decorative plates were artistic, after the fashion of the day. He erected comfortable workingmen's homes and a stately mansion for himself. He advertised extensively. He likely made one trip to London, in the latter part of 1763, and promoted shipments abroad of his bar iron. This was the period of his greatest prosperity; but at no time was his estate anything like the traditional 40,000 pounds.

Tenth—His first experiments at glass making were at Elizabeth, in 1763, not in Mannheim—a fact which, I think, Mr. Hunter's own investigations have first established. The lure of this fascinating and promising “infant industry” drew him measurably away from the iron interest and toward the larger establishment, the baronial manner of business and living and the elaborate style of his man-

sion and equipage in Manheim. Window glass and the coarser forms of table glass were made in Elizabeth, but after the Manheim glass houses started work, the first in November, 1765, the second in 1769, the variety of ware was greatly enlarged, the artistic excellence of form and color much increased and its vogue was widely extended. Stiegel's trans-Atlantic trip was followed by the importation of skilled workmen from Italy, England and Germany, and the Manheim factory came to compete with European glass centers, having its salesroom in New York and Philadelphia and agents in a score of Colonial towns.

Eleventh—As the iron industry languished and the financial embarrassment of the Stedman enterprises increased, Stiegel's plans in glass became more elaborate, extended and risky. By 1771, when their advertisement was most pretentious, his ventures were most hazardous; and his three lottery schemes—the last of which was abortive—were not so much the outcrop of a gaming spirit as they were props to a failing fortune. They did not avail, however, and the sheriff sold his Manheim estates February 3, 1774, his iron properties having been partly disposed of prior to that and Elizabeth Furnace went under the hammer a little later.

Twelfth—While Stiegel actually "did time" in prison for debt, he did not languish and lament in confinement for the long period often sympathetically and romantically related. He was in Manheim November 24, 1774, and, on December 24, 1774, the General Assembly passed the act for his relief and release, none objecting.

Thirteenth—On May 5, 1774, Stiegel had leased the glass works to Smith & Simund; and on October 25, 1775,

William Basman, Michael Dffen-derffer, Paul Zantzinger, Casper Singer and Frederick Kuhn were operating the Manheim glass works. Either James Jenkins or David Rittenhouse ran the Manheim glass works for a brief period after the Stiegel failure; Robert Morris, the financier of the Revolution, bought the mansion in September, 1777, and his family lived there until after the British évacuation of Philadelphia, in 1778.

Fourteenth—When the Manheim domed glass house was torn down, in 1812, the bricks were hauled to Neffsville, and from them was constructed the hotel there; in a marble tablet inserted in the gable wall is the inscription:

Built by
LEONARD FIDLER
and
BARBARA FIDLER,
A. D. 1812.

It will be remembered that one of our departed members was several times interrupted in her attempt to inform the Society that the old name of "Fidler's Green," which once attached to Neffsville, as firmly as "Noodledoosy" to Fruitville, did not originate from Lancaster dances held on the tavern lawn, but from the name of the builder of the hotel. She was right.

Fifteenth—Of the later life and death of Stiegel—more clearly verified by record—Mr. Hunter's narrative confirms most of the other historians. That he was a Tory, or that he was ever visited by Washington or British Generals is untrue. While he served Robert Coleman as foreman at Elizabeth, that furnace made munitions of war for the Revolutionary

army, as did all that chain of iron works between which and the British Washington kept a line of separation while the Valley Forge campaign lasted. Washington's visit to Elizabeth was as guest of Coleman, in 1792, when he was President, and Robert Morris, David Rittenhouse, Provost William Smith and Trench Francis accompanied him. Mr. Hunter confirms the fact that the location of Stiegel's grave, like that of Moses, is unknown even to this day; probability locates it at Charming Forge. Nor can the last resting-places of Stiegel's mother, his second wife or his brother, Anthony, be identified.

I have too far extended these notes to touch upon Mr. Hunter's history of glassmaking generally, and of the richness of the Stiegel output. One of our own members has a rare collection of it, which could be illuminated and illustrated to great advantage and with much interest, by comparison with the catalogues and plates of this work. They will be alike a surprise and treasure to connoisseurs and collectors.

My purpose has been neither to praise Mr. Hunter—much as his labors deserve it—nor to advertise his book, for it does not need it. He is a highly successful lawyer in New York; and his co-worker and brother-in-law, J. B. Kerfoot, is the keen book critic of "Life," the sprightliest of our weeklies. Rather, in justice to ourselves, I desire to point out wherein he seems to have set aright some inaccuracies and dispelled some myths. I cheerfully admit facts alone are not history—a man may know a "wilderness of facts" and not be a historian; as the accurate photograph may really caricature its subject and

distort the original while the true portrait reveals the soul, so the historian must have imagination and sentiment and a bit of the partisan spirit will do no harm. Mathematics is an accurate science, but "the undevout astronomer is mad." Within the limitations of ascertained facts the historian may romance as to the likely drop the chips or shavings that misrepresent nor misstate, nor suppress the truth. We, as a society, profess to record history as made in its own workshop, and we must fearlessly drop the chips or shavings that have concealed or exaggerated the truth. So long as the Stiegel tradition keeps within these bounds, so long may it grow and flourish, and each recurring Feast of Roses give new touches of color to a career that, with all its failures, must ever remain one of the most romantic and picturesque in the history of Lancaster county.

Author: Hensel, W. U. (William Uhler), 1851-1915.

Title: Stiegel's life and legends / by W. U. Hensel, Esq.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Stiegel, Henry William, 1729-1785.

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

Description: 227-235 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 18,
no. 9

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.18

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

=====

+++++

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