

The Passing of Lydia

From the Baltimore Sun.

Strange, is it not, how through some familiar medium of daily life the closed book of the heart's tender memories is sometimes opened. A newspaper sent from a distant city—the Red Rose City of Lancaster, Pa., by chance the birthplace of the writer—lies open in the hand. The New Era is its title, but in the edition perused its message pertains to an old era, the era when King George H. reigned in merry England. It records the placing by the Lancaster County Historical Society of a tablet upon a limestone boulder to mark the spot where, in 1729, the first Courts of Justice in that locality were held in the public house of John Postlethwaite, then occupying a commanding country site and located upon “the Great Conestoga Road,” the first great highway built from Philadelphia to the Susquehanna, a road that extended over the then new shire for thirty miles from Octoraro to Conestoga, the road that stretches to-day, 201 years old, through the same prosperous Scotch-Irish, English and German-Swiss settlements.

Before the coming of the white men an Indian wigwam occupied the spot afterward covered by John Postlewaite's public house. Here chiefs sat in a council and doubtless smoked their pipes of peace, and on April 2, 1771, after the Courts removed to Lancaster, the land came into possession of Andrew Fehl, whose descendants have owned and occupied it ever since.

Upon the gala occasion referred to several hundred people assembled at this historic spot and the story of the past was recalled and retold by many eminent men. To read of the awakening of a district to the value of its historic heritage is inspiring, but after the pageant picture by the written word-picture has faded there remains upon the canvas of memory some pictures infinitely sweet and tender, associated with the reader's memories of early childhood and that old house:

Memory recalls the simple dignity of an old country 'squire, Jacob Fehl, who, like his predecessors in that house, dispensed justice and married lovers within the homestead's walls.

The faces of two sweet faced, ancient ladies, the 'squire's gentle wife and whole-souled, warm-hearted sister, are evoked—they whose housewifely care and beauty and comfort to the home, as the industry of the farming 'squire and his stalwart sons brought prosperity to the farm. Daughters there were, also, pretty girls, who married and went forth to become the centres of other happy homes located within sight and sound of the old home place, but fairer than all upon memory's canvas is the picture of Lydia, the daughter, who never married, but who, in spirit, was twin sister to that dear woman whom Jean Ingelow has pictured in her poem "High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire." She whom the old man calls: My sonne's faire wife, Elizabeth," and of whom he so tenderly says, "a sweeter woman ne'er drew breath."

So of Lydia Fehl! The sweetness of her personality pervaded the old homestead as the perfume of flowers filled the garden she loved, for flowers responded blithely to the tending

of Lydia's hand. Within the sanctuary of the home the strength of her guiding character was felt, her industry contributed to the peace and order of the house, but somehow the largeness of Lydia's nature was like the golden sunshine of the open and memory glimpses her most often beside the gushing water of the old-fashioned pump or beneath the fruit-laden apple boughs of the orchard beside the house, with dogs frisking about her feet and a kitten vainly trying to reach the swaying fascination of her sunbonnet strings. Or, at the day's decline, the sunset picture of Lydia seated upon the roomy porch, with all the children who loved her nestled about her knees. For children loved and trusted her, as they love and trust only the pure in heart—and of Lydia's sanctity of soul there could be no question. That romance had touched her youth, that she had loved and lost, gave her a deeper interest to girlish minds; that she was a reader of books and a dreamer, that household tasks often lay unfinished while Lydia, book in hand, forgot the fleeting hours, only added to her lovable charm. Her ways, like her name, were full of harmony—softly she came and went. The sick blessed her soothing hand, the poor blessed her generous hand, the children loved her caressing hand. And then, suddenly, in the sweet fullness of her gracious womanhood, Lydia passed from life into immortality. Passed and was seen no more, but those who knew her felt that the poet, William Sharp, spoke truly when he said, concerning that which we in blindness call death, that "Death is not only change or sleep; it is God's seal to sanctify the soil's advance."

Miss Lydia Lantz, the writer of the above article, "The Passing of Lydia," is a native of Lancaster county. She has been a resident of Baltimore for a number of years and contributes to the woman's page of the Baltimore Sun. She is a relative of the Fehl family. A copy of The New Era containing the report of the Postlethwaite celebration was forwarded to her by a Lancastrian.

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