

## REMINISCENCES OF STRASBURG.

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The first settlements were made in 1709 by the Swiss Mennonites on the banks of Pequea creek. The name Strasburg was no doubt brought with them from their native country, but in the organization of Lancaster county in 1729 and the division into townships there seemed to be a prejudice against the German Mennonites, and the name Strasburg was entirely ignored, and what is now known as Strasburg and Paradise townships was included within the boundaries of Leacock township, although at that time patent deeds had been granted to the first settlers for over 20,000 acres of land, and in the deeds is mentioned Strasburg, Chester county. I have never been able to find any legal or Court records showing when the boundaries of Strasburg township were defined. It was only by common honesty and in justice to the first settlers that the name has been continued.

The first patent deeds are dated June 30th, A. D. 1711. The number of patent deeds for the whole township is forty-six, and they contain over 14,000 acres. The names of the original patentees are Martin Kendig, John Funk, Jacob Miller, Able Strettle, Isaac LeFever, Hans Howery, Daniel Ferree, Samuel Taylor, Jacob Groff, John Taylor, Thomas Smith, Henry Kendig, John Bowman, John Rush, John Herr, John Eckman, Isaac Whitelock, George Smith, Henry Stoner, Jacob Kendrick, John Mosser, Jacob Eshleman, John Miller, John Breckbill, Benjamin Groff, James Scott, David Witmer, John Hublely, J. and M. Fouts, Francis Bowman, Conrad Hoak, John Neff, Samuel Peoples, Samuel

Hathern and Annie Neff.

The first house of any pretensions to be a roomy and comfortable dwelling was built by Martin Kendig in the year 1717, out of walnut logs and with a straw or thatched roof. It was located about 200 yards south from the Strasburg borough line, and was occupied as the farm house until 1841, when Davis Gyger erected a fine large two-story brick house near the same place.

In the year 1816 Strasburg borough was incorporated, to contain 400 acres. In 1843 the township was divided and the eastern end of what was formerly Strasburg township is now known as Paradise.

#### **Some Old Mille.**

From the most authentic records the first mill erected in Lancaster county was on Pequea creek, about one mile northwest from the borough, along the Strasburg and Millport turnpike, and known for many years as "John Musselman's." It was built by Martin Kendig about the year 1720, on the northwestern part of his one thousand acre tract, and he sold five hundred and thirty acres, together with the water right and grist mill, to Emanuel Herr. The deed is dated the eleventh day of November, A. D. 1725, and recorded **at** Lancaster in Book W. W., page 305, etc. The mill is now in possession of Kendig & Pugh and has been converted into a roller mill. Previous to the building of this mili the people bad to go to W ilmington, Delaware, for their flour and it took three days to go and return.

About one mile southeast from the borough, along the " Mine Hill " road, is quite an old mill built in the early part of the last century by Jacob Eshleman on the north branch of Little Beaver Creek. The head of this stream is the

famous "Kelsey Springs." Some old records say the first French burrs introduced into the county were in this mill, and it was at that time called "Eshleman's Big Mill," but now it is known as the "Little Red Mill." In fact, the mill never was red, but a very large double-decker barn standing near the mill was painted red.

On September 25, 1728, a patent was granted to John Herr for eleven hundred acres of land and on this tract, in the extreme northeast corner of the township, he erected a two-story stone mill on the Pequea, about the year 1740. The original mill is yet standing, but was converted into a distillery about the beginning of the present century, at which time a new mill was erected about fifty yards further down the stream. That part of the original tract, containing about fifty acres, upon which the mill stands is yet owned by one of his descendants.

In the year 1759 Joseph Haines sold to John Herr a tract of land and saw mill located on the Pequea about midway between Stiasburg and Lampeter, and in 1769 John Herr sold to Abraham Herr the saw and grist mill. This mill is on part of a tract of land patented to Jacob Miller, containing one thousand acres. The deed is dated June 30, 1711.

In the year 1733 James Scott settled on a tract of land about two miles south from the borough, on the south side of "Bunker Hill," on the road to Now Providence, and erected on Little Beaver Creek the first fulling mill of which we have any record, and on June 12, 1767, he sold the fulling mill tract, containing about one hundred acres to Jacob Neff. He and his descendants carried on the fulling mill business for many years. A later Jacob Neff was a very conspicuous citizen of

this section of the county. He was prominent before the war as a Democratic politician, one of the faithful adherents of the late Col. Reah Frazer. His homestead was notable for striking architectural quaintness, and an immense chestnut tree which stands at the old gateway is a landmark the country around. His two sons, Aldus, a promising member of the Lancaster Bar, and Jefferson, who was of a decided mechanical turn of mind—both went into the Union army, and died early in that struggle.

About this time John Neff built a mill about one-half mile **east** from the fulling tract on the south branch of Little Beaver, and after some years he was succeeded by his son, John Neff, who became a Mormon, and in the year 1844 he left his large farm and mill property in charge of Samuel P. Bower, Esq., and moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, a town founded by the Mormons in 1840. With the migration of this people toward the **F**<sup>a</sup>r West, Mr. Neff and his family accompanied them. While he embraced the tenets of the church, he never practiced polygamy. One of the sons of his wife by a former marriage, Mr. A. Milton Musser, became one of the apostles of the Mormon Church, and is to-day a pillar in that organization.

#### **Mines and Railroads.**

The iron ore mining interests of Strasburg township are not very extensive. The Eby mines, located about two miles south of the borough, were first opened in the early part of the present century. They were worked for about twenty years and then abandoned; reopened in 1862 and operated by the Phoenix Iron Company until 1870, when they were again closed. The ore is of a very good quality, but expensive to mine.

In 1879 Peacock & Thomas opened and operated a mine on the farm of Daniel

Helm, about one mile north from New Providence. The ore is of a very superior quality ; it was hauled to New Providence by wagons and shipped on the Lancaster and Quarryville railroad.

There were two other mines operated for a short time near Refton, but on account of the dull times they have been closed.

In the year 1832 a charter was obtained for the railroad from Strasburg to connect with the Pennsylvania railroad at Leaman Place. Work was soon after commenced, and the road was graded from Swan Hotel to within about one hundred yards of Leaman Place, but owing to the lack of funds was not completed until 1852. The Lancaster and Quarryville railroad passes through the southwestern part of the township at Refton, and was opened for travel on May 11th, 1875.

#### **Churches.**

In the year 1740 John Herr, a Mennonite preacher, who was a grandson of Hans Herr, built a dwelling house on his farm about one-half mile southwest from the borough on the farm now owned by John *Keener*, in which the upper story was arranged for holding public worship. In this house and others the society held regular worship until 1804, when the society built the stone meeting house, 40 by 60 feet, near the west end of the borough, where regular service has been held to the present time. It was enlarged in 1877, and again enlarged and much improved in the year 1887.

In 1894 about five acres of ground adjoining the old graveyard were purchased and a beautiful cemetery laid out.

The first Mennonite preachers for the Strasburg district were Ulrich Breckbill and the above-named John Herr, who was afterwards appointed Bishop. He served in that office till his death. About

the year 1812 Peter Eby was appointed and in 1840 Christian Herr; in 1848, Joseph Hershey ; in 1856, Benjamin Herr and in 1878 Isaac Eby. Amos Herr was ordained a minister in 1850. He was the first Mennonite preacher in the county who conducted religious service in the English language. After nearly fifty years in the ministry he survives, much honored and respected, having wrought great good in his life.

The above-named Bisho<sup>p</sup> John Herr was the grandfather of John Herr, the founder of the Reformed Mennonite Society. Early in the year 1812 the first meeting was held and this Society organized at his house, about one-half mile north of the borough. At this meeting John Herr was unanimously chosen as pastor and Bishop. In the latter part of the same year their first meeting house was built on the west side of the Strasburg and Millport turnpike, and it is known as "Longenecker's Meeting House." The Society now has a neat brick meeting house on North Jackson street, in the borough. The founder of the Society died in May, 1850.

What was known as "the old Dutch Church," located about two miles southeast of the borough, was a small log building, about twenty feet square, erected by the German Reformed and Lutherans, and used as a union church until 1796, when the German Reformed Society built a stone church, with a gallery, about one-fourth of a mile north of New Providence. The old structure was removed in 1868 and a new brick building erected in its place, and in 1894 it was remodelled and greatly improved. The word German has been dropped from its title and is now known as the Reformed Church, with Rev. J. M. Souders as the pastor. Its recent centennial was an event of much historic interest.

The Lutherans continued to use "the old Dutch Church" until the beginning of the present century, when they built the large two-story brick church, with gallery and large pipe organ, on East Main street, in the borough, on a lot of ground which was a gift from Edward Dougherty, by deed dated February 7th, 1760, "In trust for the use of the Lutheran congregation for burial and church purposes."

The first church building in the borough of which we have any positive record was built in 1807 by the Methodists at the south end of Decatur street. The building is now known as Temperance Hall. In the *year* 1839 they built a two-story brick church on West Main street, and remodeled the same in 1868. In 1893 the old building was entirely removed and a very substantial brick church and chapel erected and dedicated January 1st, 1894. Centennial services were held in January 1896. The present pastor is Rev. Gladstone Holm.

The Presbyterians were organized into a society in 1832. They immediately commenced the building of a church on the south west corner of Decatur and Franklin streets, and on Christmas day, 1833, the church was dedicated. In 1892 Mrs. Wm. Spencer erected a neat brick chapel to the west end of the church. About the same time the whole church was remodeled and greatly improved. The society now has **a very** nice brick church and chapel, and their present pastor is Rev. David F. Giles.

#### **Educational and Literary.**

In the year 1808 the first regular school house in Strasburg borough, a small one-story brick, was erected on the east side of North Jackson street. It was built by private contributions, and a few years afterwards an association was incorpor-

ated.

In the year 1812 Mrs. Haynes commenced and taught a private school for girls in a small one-story log house which stood just east of the present M. E. Church in the borough. The house was afterwards sold to the church and occupied by the sexton. One of the requirements of Mrs. Haynes was that each pupil should furnish her own chair. The branches taught were spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic and sewing. Some of the pupils daily rode on horseback four or five miles to attend this school.

The Strasburg Academy was founded in 1839 by the Rev. David McCarter as principal. This school was largely attended by young men from all parts of the United States, and was very prosperous for about twenty years.

About the year 1845 Miss Ann McCullough founded and taught a select school for young ladies. This school was very well patronized for a number of years.

In 1870 the School Directors of the borough erected a large and imposing two-story brick building on Franklin street. This building is arranged to accommodate all the children in the borough and is divided into Primary, Secondary, Grammar and High Schools, with Superintendent and Principal, who has charge of the whole school.

The township now has ten schools, with good teachers, and school supplies and buildings that will compare very favorably with any district in the country.

Strasburg claims the honor of being the birth place of the Hon. Thomas H. Burrowes—on the 16th day of November, 1805—to whom the people of Pennsylvania are greatly indebted for our common school system. Through his influence in January, 1831, George Hoffman, Geo. Diffenbach, Alexander H. Hood, James

McPhail, Benjamin Herr and others held a meeting in the little brick school house on Jackson street, which was the first effort to found a system of public schools. The first petition was presented and signed at that meeting and it was afterwards sent to Mr. Burrowes, who was then a member of the Legislature. Some who attended that meeting never lost sight of the measure until our free school system was formally established in 1835. One who was present at the meeting is yet living.

In January, 1837, application was made for the use of a church or school house for Charles C. Burleigh to lecture on the subject of negro slavery, but the request was refused. Shortly afterwards, through the influence of George Hoffman and A. H. Hood, permission was granted to use the little Brick School House on Jackson street. On the evening of the lecture Daniel Gibbons and his son, Joseph, of Bird-in-Hand, brought Mr. Burleigh to Strasburg. There was so much feeling upon the subject that after the lecture *we* found that the lynch pins were removed from the wheels of the carriage, and it was considered prudent to have an escort for Messrs. Burleigh and Gibbons from town. The committee consisted of Joseph Bowman, Alex. H. Hood, Joseph Gonder, Jr., Samuel Spiehlman, Benjamin Herr, George Hoffman and Jacob Hildebrand.

A few days after this, through the influence of the late Col. Joel Lightner, the school house in the rear of the M. E. Church in Soudersburg was procured, and to Mr. Burleigh was granted the privilege of lecturing therein. During the lecture eggs were thrown at the speaker. Fortunately, he escaped the missiles, but the secretary of the meeting was hit with one. The person who threw the eggs

was himself hardly responsible, and when captured he gave the names of the parties who furnished the bad whisky he drank and also the eggs.

In December, 1850, Martin M. Rohrer published the first newspaper in Strasburg, called *The Strasburg Bee*. He continued it for several years, and was succeeded by Dr. George S. Whitehill. Dr. Whitehill was a scholarly man and was quite deaf. He was a great student and admirer of Shakespeare, and a very close and congenial friend of the late George W. Hensel, of Quarryville, with whose family he spent much of his time. He was a most excellent penman and book-keeper, and finally met with a tragic death on the railroad at Erie, Pa. The *Bee* was published afterwards by W. T. McPhail, Esq., until 1855, when Samuel B. Markley became the proprietor for about one year, when the paper was discontinued. In 1855 William J. Kauffman published the *Strasburg Herald* and continued it until 1861. The office was then closed as a newspaper, but the material was purchased and continued in use as a job office by Jacob Hildebrand until 1870. That year a stock company was organized with George B. Eager as editor. He published the *Free Press* until 1879, after which J. W. Sando became the editor and publisher until 1881, when it was again discontinued.

In 1883 Frank P. Eberman purchased and renewed the office with new type and steam press and published the *Free Press* for five years. He then concluded to try farming and let the printing office take care of itself, but in March, 1890, Frank P. Hart became the publisher for about one year. Since that time no paper has been published, but an excellent job office is now carried on by John G. Homsher, Esq.

The First National Bank of Strasburg, was organized in 1863, with John F. Herr as president and Edward M. Eberman cashier. The capital stock now is eighty thousand dollars, with A. R. Black, president and George W. Hensel, cashier.

During the past year a water compsnny has been incorporated to supply the borough with spring water by gravity from the Mine Hills.

In 1857 Martin and John S. Rohrer carried on distilling in the borough and were feeding from three hundred and fifty to four hundred hogs. Disease broke out amongst them and from five to forty would die in a day. Martin concluded that the hogs were bewitched and sent for Dr. Mylin, who was considered a great witch doctor. Mr. Mylin came, burned tar, witches, &c., in a large iron pot for several days, but he did not succeed in getting them all burned, for the hogs continued to die until there were only a few left. One old farmer, a near neighbor and a great believer in "spooks" and witches, became so much interested in seeing the witches burned that he neglected to go to his dinner, but remained on the ground until some of his family persuaded him to return home and get something to eat.

In the year 1837 Wm. Echternach, Maux Fidel Gertizen and Jacob Brackbill left Strasburg on horsback and when at Paradise, about one mile west of Leaman Place, they agreed to run a race down the Lancaster turnpike and that the last one to arrive at Leaman Place would have to stand the treat. They started on the run, but Mr. Brackbill for some reason was detained on the way. Echternach and Gertizen went on at a pretty fast gait. At the bridge crossing of the Pennsylvania railroad, near Leaman Place, the turnpike and bridge formed

something like the letter S. At this bridge horses and men plunged over the side of the bridge and fell about twenty feet to the bed of the railroad. Both horses and Gertzen were killed, and Echternach was very badly injured, so that he never fully recovered.

In 1840 Benjamin Barr was building a large double decker barn on his farm about midway between Martinsville and Refton and at the raising by some mishap the scaffolding gave way and a number of the men and timber fell a great distance. Jonas Long and a man named Eckman were instantly killed and others very severely injured.

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