

THE STRASBURG SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY

by

William Frederic Worner

What cannot art and industry perform
When science plans the progress of their toil.

Beattie.

Not long since Miss Virginia B. Clark, presented the writer with a little pamphlet, 4x6½ inches in size, which was found among the papers of her sister, the late Martha Bladen Clark, corresponding secretary of the Lancaster County Historical Society for more than twenty years. It is a thin volume of twenty-four closely printed pages, bound in paper and stained on every page with the mysterious blotches which are the hallmarks of Time. To him who would draw local history from the fountain-head, especially that which pertains to Strasburg and its environs, it is worth more than its weight in gold. It is one of three copies extant, of the other two, one is in the Library of Congress, and the other is in the collection of the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

On the flyleaf, Mr. John Shippen, has indited the following inscription:

"Gift of the Author
to
General Jas. Ross,
Lancaster."

The title-page reads:

"An
Oration
delivered on the
Anniversary
of the

SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY

Eleventh November, 1793.

at

Society Hall, Strasburg Village, Lancaster County,
Pennsylvania

At the request of the members

By John Shippen, A. B.

Where Liberty dwells, there is my Country.

Doctor Franklin.

For he that values Liberty, confines
His zeal for her predominance, within
No narrow bounds. Her cause engages him.
Wherever pleaded. 'Tis the cause of Man.

Cowpers' Winter Morning walk.

PHILADELPHIA

Printed by Francis Bailey, at Yorick's-Head

No. 116, High street,

M, DCC, XCIV."

On the last page appears a list of the officers elected at the meeting which the Honorable John Shippen had the pleasure of addressing:

"Society-Hall, 11th Nov. 1793.

"The following gentlemen were today elected as officers of the society for the ensuing year.

President

Rev. NATHANIEL W. SAMPLE, D. D.

Committee of Correspondence

Rev. N. W. Sample, Mr. John Funck, Isaac Ferree, Esq.

Col. James Mercer, Mr. George Duffield, sen. Jacob Carpenter, Esq and Dr. Everhard Gruber.

Treasurer

Mr. George Duffield, sen.

Librarian

Mr. John Funck

Assistant Librarian.

George Deffield, (1) jun. Esq.

Secretary

Bernard Frazer."

On page three appears the following "extract of a letter" from the President of the Scientific Society of Strasburg Village to John Shippen, Chester county:

"I am requested by the society to inform you, that they have unanimously appointed you to deliver their Anniversary Oration for 1793. I hope you will make it convenient to comply with their wishes.

"Nathaniel W. Sample."

Beneath this is printed an excerpt from the minutes of the society, furnished by the secretary for publication and dated the day after the meeting:

"At the annual meeting of the society on the 2d Monday in November, 1793.

"On motion, unanimously resolved.

"That a committee be appointed to wait on Mr. John Shippen to return him the thanks of the society for the Oration delivered by him this day, and to inform him that it is the request of the society that the same be published.

"James Mercer, John Breckbill, and Jacob Carpenter, Esquires, were accordingly appointed a committee for that purpose.

"Extract from the Minutes.

"Bernard Frazer, Secretary.

"Nov. 12th, 1793."

On the next page appears this inscription:

"To the

Rev. Nathaniel W. Sample, D. D.

President

and to the

MEMBERS OF THE SCIENTIFIC
SOCIETY OF

Strasburg Village,

The following oration

is most respectfully

inscribed

by their sincere friend

and

humble servant,

JOHN SHIPPEN

West-Chester, November 19th, 1793."

Then follows John Shippen's oration on "The Blessings of Civil Society and Government." The speaker in closing, addressed a few complimentary remarks to the president and fellow-members of the organization. He

very briefly related how associations like the Scientific Society originated and what purpose they served in a community such as Strasburg and in society in general. He added "that since a state of society is favorable to the progress of learning, the improvement of the arts and sciences, and the propagation of Christianity; so, my brethren, and from the same obvious reasons too, but operating here with additional force, are Philosophy, Knowledge and Religion peculiarly indebted to particular associations of men, entered into for the important purposes of promoting and advancing them."

John Shippen, obviously, must have been a member of the Strasburg Scientific Society from the time of its inception, or else he was elected at a meeting held previous to the one which he addressed. Note the use of the personal pronoun as he relates:

"Institutions, of the nature of which our institution partakes, were formed upon social and liberal principals, animated by a zeal for knowledge and virtue, and having in view a common benefit and improvement."

He continues:

"Two years have now elapsed since the origin of this society. It has had many obstacles to combat—many wants to supply; these are however, gradually decreasing; and we can now behold our institution, although yet in its infancy, well organized and pretty firmly established.

He observes, with satisfaction, that the society has already been the means of doing much good. To borrow again from his masterly address:

"Besides the desire of knowledge which it inspires, and which it at the same time, I trust, in some measure gratifies, and the desire of knowledge is increased by gratification like the flame is by fuel.

In defining further the scope and purpose of the society the speaker diverges from the dusty road of details to give us a passage which is poetical in spirit and graceful in wording:

"Besides the emulation which it excites among the members: and emulation naturally leads to improvement. In short, besides the grand objects sought for, and which were the principal motives for instituting our society, one very essential and important good has resulted which reflects no less honor on the institution, that it has reflected happiness to the members: not merely as members of our little society; but as citizens and as members of the great society of mankind."

Strasburg in 1793 was not unlike other villages of its size and population in America. Among its inhabitants it numbered those persons who meddled with the wordly affairs of neighbors and friends. This often led to disputes and quarrels of a nature in which the feelings of those who provoked them were not spared. John Shippen was cognizant of the animosity that existed among certain of the members. In recounting the good accomplished by the Strasburg Scientific Society, he did not hesitate to remind them:

"It has been the happy mean of wearing off or eradicating certain foolish dislikes and enmities, which had once existed between some of the members and which might have otherwise increased and proved fatal to both parties. It has substituted, in the place of these, a joint pursuit and interest; and united as all in the bonds of amity and fraternal affection."

The speaker then cautioned them:

"As long as this institution shall be productive of these and similar advantages, which tend to advance the happiness of civil society; so long, my brethren, will this institution be worthy of a zealous continuance."

He also admonished them that if the Strasburg Scientific Society should "unhappily so degenerate from its original, pure and honorable principles as to become an instrument of division and party spirit, it will cease to be respectable, because it will cease to be useful. It will become a curse, instead of a blessing."

Mr. Shippen was, however, happy to add that the "present glad prospect of the Strasburg Scientific Society is not in the most distant degree interrupted by the fog of apprehension;" and he further assured them that "friendship eminently prevails; and friendship is the best security against such a degeneracy."

That he entertained great expectations for the society's future welfare and looked forward to the time when it would wield a potent influence for good, not only in the village where it was located but in the state as well, is evident from this prophetic utterance:

"Our society on the contrary, bids fair to become in time a stately, useful and respectable institution;" and modestly added, "then shall some abler pen prepare, some tongue, more eloquent, pronounce its merited eulogium."

He congratulated his brother members and "our worthy president on the happy conclusion of a second year," and reminded them that "our meetings have been attended with considerable improvement to ourselves, and been uniformly remarkable for their harmony and brotherly love."

He felicitated the president in behalf of his brother members, and assured him that his conduct in the discharge of the duties of his office had given universal satisfaction, and justly entitled him to their highest approbation, gratitude and esteem." He supplemented this with:

"A third time is the unanimous voice of the members about to place you in that office. We hope you will freely accept of it, as a testimony of our sentiments toward you, and because you can be eminently useful in that capacity."

In justice to his own feelings and to those of the gentlemen who were the original projectors of the organization, he felt that he must in a particular manner congratulate them. In terms of warmest flattery, which undoubtedly stirred the emotions of his auditors, he spoke as follows:

"You must feel a sensible satisfaction in reflecting, that the sanguine wishes and expectations which you had formed on the birthday of the institution, have not, during its two years' existence, been in the least disappointed; but that, on the contrary, they have been amply fulfilled and answered, and your exertions and anxiety are fully repaid. The recollection of that day and an observation of the present reasonable prospects of the institution, must cause in your breasts, sensations of the pleasing and satisfactory kind."

He closed his address by congratulating his audience on having such a society in their midst.

The foregoing excerpts from John Shippen's oration indicate that the Strasburg Scientific Society was organized on November 11, 1791. The Reverend Nathaniel Welshard Sample, its first president, was serving his third term when the pamphlet was published. That the society was in a rather flourishing condition during the first few years of its existence, and was recognized as an institution of the highest culture and learning, is evident from a footnote appended to John Shippen's address, in which he stated 'besides the books, which the funds and stock of the society have, from time to time enabled them to procure, many valuable donations have been made them in books by gentlemen at a distance; and particularly by several of the booksellers of Philadelphia."

It seems that the funds for organizing and carrying on the work of the society, the purchase of books and scientific instruments, were obtained by selling shares of stock in the association.

Strasburg in 1791, the year in which the Scientific Society was organized, was neither a large nor populous village. Bishop Asbury, under date of July 28, 1799, wrote in his journal concerning it:

"This place I judge contains between sixty and seventy houses."

It occupied an important place on the "Great Conestoga Road," over which passed much traffic from Newport to points in the then "far west"

Strasburg was one of the chief stopping places east of the Susquehanna. It contained, at least, eight "publick houses," and many private ones, which offered "entertainment for man and beast." One sees and hears in fancy, the heavy Conestoga wagons with their proud and skilled teamsters, trailing through the elongated village or stopping at the hostleries.

This attracted to the village a class of people uncouth in manners and speech. What could be more offensive than "Hell's Hole"? a name applied to it in its infancy, later superseded by "Bettlehausen" (Beggartown), indicative of the pecuniary status of the inhabitants. In addition to this, the town was without a church or meeting-house even though a clergyman had resided within its boundaries since 1782. However, one must not suppose that all the inhabitants were of the type here pictured. Strasburg had more public-spirited citizens than other villages of a like size, and scholarly men interested in literature, the arts and sciences, and the current topics of the day. But a list of those who have borne well their part in church, commonwealth and nation would weary writer and reader.

The minutes of the Strasburg Scietific Society have become either lost or were destroyed inadvertently by some careless housewife (2.) A diligent search has been made amongst the mass or miscellaneous junk—the accumulation of years—reposing under a mantle of dust in many a neglected garret in the village, without discovering them. Libraries and scientific institutions have aided in the search, which thus far has proven unsuccessful. Were we able to locate them, what a light they would shed upon the activities of the society, and affairs in general in the staid old village a century and a quarter ago.

Today, we can only conjecture where the meetings of the society were held and where its possessions were kept. The correspondence is headed "Society Hall." But where was Society Hall? It could not have been in the old Methodist church on South Decatur street, as some have supposed, for that little edifice was not erected until 1807. Possibly the society met in the hostelry now known as the Washington House, or in that fine old Colonial structure at the western end of the village—the Golden Swan hotel, John Funck, who was very active in the affairs of the society, kept a tavern in Strasburg as early as 1792. He lived in a house which stood where the National bank now stands (3.) I am not prepared to state, positively, in which place the meetings were held, but am inclined to think that the "publick house" kept by John Funck sheltered the institution.

The society enjoyed about twelve years of uninterrupted existence. Its condition at first was flourishing, and more than gratified the fondest expectations of the promoters. Eventually, however, some of the members died, others moved to more distant localities, and during its later years the institution suffered a general decline. In the early spring of 1803 the few remaining members foresaw that dissolution was imminent and a meeting was called to consider the situation.

The Intelligencer & Weekly Advertiser of Tuesday, March 22, 1803, contains this information:

.. STRASBURG SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY TO BE DISSOLVED

"At a meeting of a number of members of the Scientific Society of Strasburg, held at M. Jacob Bear's in Strasburg, the 5th of February last, it was determined that a general meeting of the members should be requested; that measures might be adopted to dispose of the Books and other Property of the said Society to the best advantage. In consequence thereof, all the members are earnestly requested to meet at the House of Mr. Jacob Bear, (4) in Strasburg on Saturday, the 2nd day of April next, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon, for the above purpose.

"March 22.

"N. B. Any person having any books out will please to return them by the day above mentioned."

A general meeting of the members of the society was held as requested, at which time it was decided to disband, sell the books, scientific instruments, and other possessions of the organization. That due and timely notice of the action of the society was given to all the members is evident from the following, which appeared in the *Intelligencer & Weekly Advertiser* of Tuesday, April 26, 1803:

"PUBLIC NOTICE

"On Saturday, the 21st of May next, will be sold, at the House of Mr. John Funck, the following, being the property of the Scientific Society of Strasburg, viz. a large walnut bookcase, a barometer and thermometer, a large Family Bible, Concordance, Doddridges Family Expositor, 6 vols. American Museum, 12; Hume's England, 8; Smollet's Continuation, 5; Robertson's History of Charles the 5th., 4 vols. Ramsey's American Revolution, 2; Smith's Wealth of Nations, 3; Robertson's Astronomy, with a variety of other books and pamphlets.

"The Sale will begin at 10 o'clock, A. M. when attendance will be given, and the conditions made known by

"John Breckbill.

"Thomas Burrows.

"April 26, 1803.

"N. B. Those who have books in their possession, belonging to the Society are requested to return them to Mr. Funck, before the day of the Sale."

Some one of the many delvers in the strata of local post-Revolutionary history may beguile the tedium of statistical labors by ascertaining how much of the following, which appears in Harris's "Biographical History," is fiction and how much is fact:

"When Dr. Joseph Priestley, the celebrated philosopher, first emigrated from England to America, in 1794, he settled and lived for a short time in Strasburg, Lancaster county. He lived in the house now owned by William Spencer, ex-commissioner, for about six months. He removed thence to Northumberland, Pa., where he lies buried."

The house, herein, referred to is a little one-story log structure, recently weather-boarded, which stands on the west side of the second block on Decatur street, three doors south of the Presbyterian church (6.) At the time Dr. Priestley is supposed to have lived in it, the house was owned by John Miller and wife, Veronica. (7)

Tradition, "the elder sister of History," to which only such credit should be given as is rightfully hers, says that Dr. Priestley not only lived in Strasburg, but that he took a keen interest in the affairs of the Scientific Society, and on one occasion delivered an address before its august assemblage. Since the records of the Society are lost, we have no means of knowing whether this is correct or not.

I have examined carefully the Memoirs of Dr. Priestley and cannot find in them the slightest reference to Strasburg or its immediate vicinity. If he ever lived in Strasburg no mention seems to be made of the fact.

Dr. Edgar Fahs Smith—than whom we have no better authority on that part of Priestley's life (8) spent in America—after describing his arrival, and subsequent stay in New York says.

"Accordingly, on June 18, 1794, they left New York, after a fortnight's visit."

The *Advertiser* of Philadelphia, June 21, 1794, contains these lines:

"Last Thursday evening arrived in town from New York the justly celebrated philosopher, Dr. Joseph Priestley."

It was about the middle of July, 1794, that the Priestleys left Philadelphia on their journey to Northumberland. (9) Priestley wrote of the latter town under date of September 4, 1794:

"Nothing could be more delightful or more healthy than this place."

Harris states that he lived in Strasburg for about six months. If he left Philadelphia the middle of July and was writing from Northumberland in September, he could not have tarried anywhere six months. Dr. Edgar Fahs Smith says:

"I have never seen any statement in any of Priestley's letters—and I have examined many of them and own quite a number—to the effect of his having lived anywhere but in Northumberland and in Philadelphia during the period he was lecturing here."

Dr. Priestley attended meetings of the American Philosophical Society, of which he was an illustrious member, in Philadelphia in 1796, 1797, 1801 and 1803. On April 17, 1801, he was stopping in Reading, Pa. A letter addressed to John Vaughan, Esq., written by Priestley in the latter town bears testimony to this. It is a well established fact that in going from Philadelphia to Northumberland, he followed the Schuylkill. Ex-Mayor Getz, of Reading, Pa., has sent me a drawing representing the course Priestley took in going from Philadelphia to Reading and from Reading to Northumberland.

These are, apparently, well-established facts, so I do not see how the paragraph referred to on page 554 of Harris's history can be regarded as correct. Dr. Smith assures me that although he has worked so long in digging up early facts he is not prepared to brand the statement as absolutely untrue. It would seem, however, that if Dr. Priestley ever resided in Strasburg, somewhere in the history of the county, or in its county records, there would be definite evidence of the same. The little Priestley family—the two sons and daughter-in-law constituted a pretty strong magnet to draw the Doctor and his wife promptly to Northumberland. Some day the minutes of the Scientific Society may be found and from them we may learn whether he ever attended a meeting or resided in Strasburg village. Until such time, this will remain one of those interesting traditions that baffle the historian and try his patience sorely.

The history of the Strasburg Scientific Society would not be complete unless it contained brief biographical sketches of the men who were actively engaged in the affairs of the organization.

The Ancestors of Rev. Nathaniel Welshand Sample emigrated from Ireland and settled in the southeastern part of what is now York county, Pa. (10) The subject of this sketch first saw the light of day on April 16, 1752. He attended the classical school founded and conducted by the Reverend Dr. Robert Smith at Pequea, Lancaster county, Pa. (11) where he was prepared for the College of New Jersey (Princeton University.) He was graduated from the latter institution in 1776.

The Presbytery of New Castle held a meeting in Leacock church during the first week in January, 1779, at which time it was unanimously agreed to license Mr. Sample to preach the Gospel. At a meeting of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia held in 1779. "New Castle Presbytery reported that since the meeting of Synod (Synod of New York and Philadelphia) in 1777, they have licensed Messrs. Matthew Tate, Nathaniel Sample and John Finley, to preach the Gospel.' From the foregoing it is evident that he was licensed during the period that intervened between the meeting of New Castle Presbytery in January, 1779 and the meeting of Synod which was held in May of the same year. (9)

Whilst a licentiate, he supplied the church at St. George's, Delaware, for six months, and at the expiration of that time he received a call to become the pastor, which he declined. He was still pursuing his theological studies under the tutelage of the Rev. William Foster, (3) pastor of the Upper Octorara church, at the time of Mr. Foster's death, which occurred September 30, 1780.

Leacock church formed a union with Middle Octorara in 1780. On October 30th of the same year, Leacock, Octorara and Lancaster churches united in a call for Mr. Sample's pastoral services. He was at the time a licentiate of the Presbytery of New Castle. The Rev. Robert Smith, D. D., of Pequea, moderated the call at Leacock, and the Rev. James Latta, D. D., of Chestnut Level, officiated in the same capacity at Middle Octorara.

At a meeting of New Castle Presbytery held in West Nottingham church on October 24, 1781, the following entry was made upon the minutes:

"Commissioners from the congregations of Leacock and Middle Octorara appeared before Presbytery requesting that Mr. Sample be ordained and installed among them, and that as early a season may be appointed for that purpose as may be; and the Presbytery accordingly agree that they meet at Leacock the 2nd Tuesday of December, and that, if their way be clear, he be accordingly ordained and installed the next day; and that Mr. William R. Smith preach the sermon, Mr. James Finley preside, and that Mr. Robert Smith give the charge. Ordered that Mr. Sample prepare a lecture on Rom. 8:1:9, and be ready for the usual examination."

Nathaniel W. Sample accepted the united calls (14) of Octorara, Leacock and Lancaster churches on October 25, 1781. The calls from Octorara and Leacock stipulated for 200 bushels of wheat each, annually. The congregation at Lancaster was not nearly as large as those aforementioned, hence the call from Lancaster stipulated only for 100 bushels of wheat annually.

The Presbytery met at Leacock on the second Tuesday of December, 1781, but, unfortunately, the page of the record is marked "minutes wanting;" therefore we have no Presbyterial account of Mr. Sample's ordination and installation.

Nathaniel Welshard Sample was nine and twenty when he was joined in holy wedlock to Elizabeth Cowan. They took up their residence in the village of Strasburg on April 10, 1782.

Mr. Sample attended the meeting of Synod which met in Philadelphia in 1783. At a meeting of Synod held in the same city in 1786, which he attended, his name appears upon the minutes in full for the first time—Nathaniel Welshard Sample. The early records of the Presbyterian Church spell the name Semple, but in the old family Bible the name is always spelled Sample. (15)

About the year 1790 Mr. Sample opened a theological school in his home in Strasburg. (16) The school was held in the room later occupied by Levi Waidley as a tailor shop. The house at present is owned and occupied by John Hagans. A number of young men who afterwards became eminent and useful ministers, pursued their theological studies under Mr. Sample's direction. (17) From the History of Leacock Presbyterian church written by the Rev. P. J. Timlow and published in 1854, I extract a partial list of students who studied theology under Mr. Sample. (18)

"The Rev. Stuart Williams, who settled at Snow Hill; the Rev. James McGraw, D. D., who settled at Nottingham; the Rev. Dr. Paxton, who settled in Marsh Creek, Adams county; the Rev. John Coulter of Tuscarora, Penna.; the Rev. John B. Slemmons, of Eastern Shore, Maryland; the Rev. Robert Kennedy of Welsh Run, Franklin county; the Rev. Dr. Francis Heron of Pittsburgh and the Rev. Charles Cummins, who settled first at Chestnut Level and afterwards in Florida, Orange county, New York."

On November 11, 1791, the Scientific Society of Strasburg, was organized and the Rev. Nathaniel Welshard Sample was elected president. His ripe scholarship, vast erudition, equable disposition and innate love of mankind united with a lively interest in all that concerned his adopted village ranked him as a popular and promising citizen and eminently qualified him

for the presidency of the infant society. In the earlier days more deference was paid to intellectual attainments because more rare; scholarly men were such from the love of knowledge and were so absorbed in research that they gave little thought to material affairs. They led precarious lives and often died poor. Mr. Sample belonged to this class.

The *Intelligencer* and *Weekly Advertiser* of October 27, 1802, contained an announcement that Robert Elliott, M. A. late teacher in a classical school at Easton, Maryland, would open an academy in the village of Strasburg on January 1, 1803. Prospective students were requested to apply to the Rev. Mr. Sample who would see that they were accommodated and carefully attended to.

Elizabeth Cowan, (19) born June 16, 1761, became the first wife of Dr. Sample on October 2, 1781. Nine children were the fruit of this union. The first was born June 29, 1782, and the last on March 8, 1803. Mrs. Elizabeth Sample died July 3, 1818, aged 57 years and 17 days. Her remains were interred in the old graveyard adjoining Leacock church.

Mr. Sample married the second time. In the *Lancaster Intelligencer* of Tuesday, April 20, 1822, appeared a paragraph which would now figure among society items:

"Married on Tuesday evening last (April 16, 1882) by F. A. Latta, Minister of the Gospel, N. W. Sample, Minister of the Gospel, to Miss Sara Evans, of Little Britain."

It is deliciously refreshing in this day of itching ears in the pews and itineracy in the pulpit, to note that Mr. Sample as minister of Octorara, Leacock and Lancaster churches had come into the congregations, as his people to the land, "to stay". For forty years he labored in these three churches. While Mr. Sample was pastor, the congregation of Leacock was incorporated, March 10, 1787 by act of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania. (20). As pastor of the congregation in Lancaster, he officiated at the funeral of John Wilkes Kittera, Esq., representative from this county in the Congress of the United States, from 1791 to 1801, and committed his body to the earth, where it now lies under the Evans Memorial Chapel of the First Presbyterian church of Lancaster, Pa. (21) During the latter part of his pastorate the church in Lancaster was enlarged and improved (22). In October, 1821, he resigned the charge of the three congregations.

Mr. Sample is said to have been a very interesting and popular preacher, with a strong, full and melodious voice. The Rev. Dr. Martin of Chancesford has paid him this just tribute:

"Sample was a popular preacher; corpulent; very few men appeared to better advantage in the pulpit. His voice was voluminous, his fancy was quite abundant, and the truth flowed from his lips in very winning forms. He was not punctual in family visiting, but was much loved and was heard by many with pleasure and profit."

Mr. Sample kept no sessional records of the three churches which he served, consequently much data pertaining to the history of these churches and which would be of great interest and value, has been lost.

The death of Mr. Sample is duly entered in the family Bible now in possession of the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, thus:

"Nathaniel W. Sample, Senior, departed this life July 23, 1834, aged 83 years." (In reality he was 82 years, 3 months and 7 days old.)

From his obituary which appeared in a local weekly, printed on paper now falling to pieces with age, I quote the following:

"Died at his residence in Strasburg township, Lancaster county, on Thursday, the 24th ult., the Rev. N. W. Sample, father of N. W. Sample, in the 83rd year of his age.

"Mr. Sample discharged the duties of the pastorate in the three churches for forty years. He was distinguished for great eminence in learning,

piety and patriotism and such gifts of heart and mind and person as endeared him indissolubly to his people.”.

The inscription on his time-battered tombstone in the old Leacock burying-ground may still be deciphered:

REV. NATHANIEL W. SAMPLE

Died August 26, 1834

aged 83 years.

Dr. Timlow and other biographers of this learned divine, have copied the date of his demise from the unpretending tombstone in Leacock churchyard. In the Lancaster Journal of August 1, 1834, it is stated that he departed this life on July 24th, 1834. In the old family Bible embrowned and blotched by time, the date of Mr. Sample's death is entered July 23, 1834. Thus three different dates are given. The one in the family Bible is probably correct.

Mr. Sample died intestate (23) and letters of administration were granted to his son, Nathaniel W. Sample, Jr., Joseph Lefever and Jacob Bowers on August 6, 1834. Letters of administration are not usually granted until the person is dead, hence the stone cutter with his date August 26, 1834 is wrong. (24)

Since the personal estate of Mr. Sample was not sufficient to pay his debts the court ordered the sale of his property by the administrators. The house and half-acre lot in Strasburg, were purchased by Abram K. Witmer. Later, they passed into the hands of John Waidley and at present are owned by his son-in-law, John Hagans.

On an unpretentious tombstone in the old graveyard adjoining the Strasburg Mennonite church, appears the following tautological inscription:

JOHN FUNCK

March 5, 1755,

married to Ann, daughter of

CHRISTIAN HERR

Pequea, April 3, 1775,

Died May 31, 1831,

aged 76 years, 2 months and 26 days.

He was of German descent.

The subject of this sketch is a descendant of John Funck, the original patentee of five hundred acres of land in Strasburg and Lampeter townships. In 1781 he purchased a tract of fifteen acres which he subsequently divided into building lots. This parcel of land was situated in what is now the center of Strasburg borough extended eastward from Decatur street to the Lutheran graveyard and southward from the "publick street of the said village" (Main street) a distance of fourteen degrees. John Funck owned considerable land in Strasburg township and other parts of the county. He seems to have bought and sold much property. On the tax lists for 1790, 1792, 1796 and 1800, his name appears as "innkeeper for Strasburg township."

When the Strasburg Scientific Society was organized on November 11, 1791, he was chosen librarian. There is a tradition—apparently well authenticated—that the society was not only founded in his tavern but that its books, papers, scientific instruments and other possessions were lodged under his hospitable roof. In fact many assume that "Society Hall" the headquarters and meeting place of the organization was none other than John Funck's "publick house."

John Funck lived at the southeast corner of Main and Decatur streets. His name is perpetuated in "Funck's lane"—a narrow street two blocks in length—in the southern part of the town. In 1807 he sold a lot of ground, containing a small fraction over one-eighth of an acre, situated near the south end of Decatur street to the "Society of Methodists". On it the denomination had erected a small one-story building which evidently was used

by them as a place of worship before the formal deed of transfer was made. It is claimed to be one of the oldest Methodist churches in Pennsylvania. Later, it was converted into Templars' Hall and was used as a meeting place of a temperance society known as the Good Templars. At present it is the common property of all the religious denominations in Strasburg and is used by them as a parish hall for social gatherings.

John Funck was undoubtedly the most versatile man of his day and generation. His interests were not confined solely to the village in which he dwelt. He was one of Strasburg's public spirited citizens and the foremost business man of his bailiwick. In addition to being the keeper of a village inn he was an extensive dealer in real estate. His trade was that of a millwright. He was appointed by the court to serve as agent or inspector for the 6th district at the gubernatorial election in 1802; and shortly after the borough of Strasburg was erected by Act of Assembly of March 13, 1816, he was elected a member of the council.

It was proposed in the spring of 1797 that a company be formed to work the Gap copper mines. Fifty thousand dollars were required to finance the project. Benjamin Henry, of Lancaster, was the author of a prospectus setting forth the aims of such a company. John Funck was associated with Henry, and those living in the vicinity of Strasburg who were disposed to become subscribers were requested to leave their names with him.

As proprietor of a public tavern, his time was largely occupied in discharging the duties of host. To his mill and real estate projects he was obliged to devote much attention. Yet in spite of this, John Funck found some leisure in which to pursue his favorite avocation. His one and only contribution to science is all the more remarkable when we consider the magnitude of the undertaking. In the latter part of the eighteenth century he built a flying machine. His first and only trial with it was made from the roof of his house and both man and machine landed in the street with dire results.

John Funck was more than fifty years of age when he began to study art. He was a painter of no mean ability and is said to have been a pupil of Sully. About the time that Eicholtz was entering the profession, Funck had reached the acme of his artistic career. When the former carried his portrait of Nicholas Biddle to Boston for the inspection of the celebrated Stuart, the latter had just completed what is considered by many as his masterpiece.

There are few paintings from his brush in existence. The portrait of a "Venetian Girl," in the possession of Mrs. Emily Bishop Musselman, of Strasburg, is very crude, and was, perhaps, one of his earliest attempts. The portraits of the man and woman on the north wall of the room in which you are now assembled (A. Herr Smith Memorial Building) were painted by him. The one on a poplar board is a likeness of his wife, while that on canvass is an auto portrait of the artist. These paintings belonged to the late Eliza E. Smith, and hung for many years in her old home—the Caleb Cope house—on North Lime street. They are now the property of the A. Herr Smith Memorial Library and not of the Lancaster County Historical Society as some have supposed.

The Presbyterian Historical Society, in Philadelphia, has in its possession a portrait of the Rev. Nathaniel Welshard Sample which was painted by John Funck—the neighbor and friend of Mr. Sample for more than forty years.

Mrs. Charles B. Keller, of Lancaster, Pa., owns two miniatures of the Rev. N. W. Sample and his first wife, Elizabeth Cowan. These pictures are painted on wood.

There is an alleged portrait of the Rev. Hans Herr in the possession of Mr. Martin B. Herr, a lineal descendent, which was painted by John Funck. It was restored not long since by the late William B. Deichler.

Whether the portrait Funck made is a copy of one which the Rev. Hans Herr had painted in Europe, before he emigrated to America, I am not able to say. One fact is certain, the Rev. Hans Herr did not pose for Funck, since the former died in 1725, while the latter was not born until thirty, years later.

The portrait of the Rev. Hans Herr on the west wall of this room (North parlor of A. Herr Smith Memorial Building) is a copy of John Funck's, and I am told, was painted by the late Leon von Osko. It, too, is owned by the A. Herr Smith Memorial Library.

John Funck painted a portrait of Bishop Asbury, which is considered to be his masterpiece. The story of how it came to be painted bears repeating at this time:

The pioneer Bishop of the Methodist Church in America, the Right Rev. Francis Asbury, visited Strasburg on several occasions during the period that intervened between 1791 and 1813. On April 6th of the latter year he made his last official visitation to Strasburg village. It was about this time that John Funck painted on a poplar board, the portrait of the bishop. As an amateur, he was considered a good artist, and the portrait of Bishop Asbury is conceded by many to be his best work. The Rev. Henry Boehm, who had spent many years as the traveling companion of the bishop, pronounced the picture a very striking and correct likeness. When John Funck's effects were sold, the portrait was purchased by John Steacy, and hung for many years in "The Sandstone"—the oldest house still standing in Strasburg.

John Steacy emigrated from Wexford, Ireland, about the year 1815. He was a staunch Methodist and a friend of the bishop, whom he had met in Europe. Upon the death of Mr. Steacy, the portrait descended to his daughter, Mrs. Sarah Attmore, who in turn, at her death, bequeathed it to the American University at Washington, D. C. where it now hangs in Asbury Memorial Hall.

When the loan exhibition of historical and contemporary portraits was held in 1912, the committee appointed for the collection of oil paintings visited this room and inspected the portraits of John Funck and his wife, Ann. The committee knew nothing about the subjects represented, had no knowledge of the artist, and recognized that the paintings possessed little merit. Hence they were not exhibited. It is unfortunate, however, that the artist was not given some recognition. His likeness of Bishop Asbury entitled him to this, and even though his work was not exhibited, his name should, at least, have appeared among the list of those who helped to establish Lancaster county's place in art.

A critical estimate of John Funck's paintings is scarcely within the purpose of this sketch. There seems to be little evidence that he had any actual instruction in art, even though tradition—ever an unsafe guide—claims him a pupil of Sully. In the main, I believe he was self-taught. His paintings, like those of many amateurs, are not always technically correct, and reveal much that is crude. Despite this, John Funck had a subtle spark of genius, and had he cultivated painting at an earlier age and with a different environment, he might have rivaled, if not excelled, the distinguished Jacob Eicholtz.

On April 3, 1775, he was married to Ann, daughter of Christian Herr and Maria Bowman, and great-great-grand-daughter of Rev. Hans Herr. She departed this life on August 13, 1836, and not 1837, the date carved on her tombstone in the old Mennonite graveyard.

John Funck died on May 31, 1831. In his will, among other things, he bequeathed the sum of five hundred dollars to his wife, to be given to the "poor and needy." (33).

Jacob Smith, father of the late Eliza E. Smith who donated this building to the city of Lancaster, Pa., for a library, was a step-brother of John Funck.

REFERENCES

1. Copied verbatim. Obviously a typographical error; should have been spelled Duffield.
2. Ellis and Evans, page 659.
3. Original tax list in County Commissioners' office for year 1792.
4. Jacob Bear's name appears on tax lists for 1790, 1792 and 1802 as inn-keeper. He is also referred to as innkeeper in 1798 in deed-book E, vol. 3, page 172.
Page 554.
6. Recorder's office, book K. K., page 421.
7. John Miller purchased the property from Jacob Hooper and wife Susannah, May 20, 1793.
8. Priestley in America, 1794-1804, page 47.
9. Ibid, page 52.
10. Biographical Annals of Lancaster County, page 151, states he was born in Scotland. This is undoubtedly incorrect.
11. Dr. Robert Smith's Academy at Pequea, page 8, by Prof. Jacob N. Beam.
12. Presbyterian Encyclopaedia, page 801, states he was licensed in 1799. This is incorrect.
13. History of Upper Octorara Church, by J. Smith Futhey, Esq., pages 81-83.
14. Harris's Biographical History, page 510, states that he first located in Strasburg and preached for the congregation of that place. This is incorrect. The Strasburg congregation was not formed until 1832.
15. On the tax list for 1787 his name appears as "Nathan Sample, D. D.;" on the list for 1796 it is written "Nathaniel Sample, Minister" I have been unable to learn whether any college ever conferred the degree of D. D. upon him.
16. History of Education in Pennsylvania, by J. P. Wickersham, page 126.
17. Biographical Annals of Lancaster County, page 151.
18. Page 21.
19. Biographical Annals of Lancaster County, page 151, it is stated she was born in Maryland. Cannot authenticate this.
20. Ellis and Evans, page 919.
21. Ibid., page 227.
22. Ibid., page 474.
23. Orphans' Court Records, book G., vol. 1, page 198.
24. Ellis and Evans, page 919.
25. Deed book L, Vol. 3, page 568.
26. Deed book, X, page 651.
27. Deed book Y, Vol. 3, page 494.
28. Ellis and Evans, page 659.
29. The Intelligencer and Weekly Advertiser, Sept. 8, 1802.
30. Ellis and Evans, page 661.
31. The Lancaster Journal, April 28, 1797.
32. Registers' Office, Book P, Vol. 2, page 123.
33. Registers' Office, Book Q, page 61.

Author: Worner, William Frederic.

Title: The Strasburg Scientific Society / by William Frederic
Worner.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Sample, Nathaniel Welshard, d. 1834.
Funck, John, 1755-1831.
Strasburg Scientific Society (Pa.)
Strasburg (Pa.)--History.

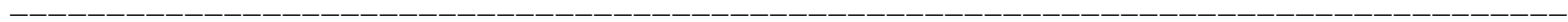
Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1921

Description: 133-145 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 25,
no. 9

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.25

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)



+++++

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