

McCall's Ferry Company

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

IN Vol. XI, pp. 131-144, of the Proceedings of The Lancaster County Historical Society, appeared an article entitled, "Some Early Lancaster County Bridges." In that article the author, the late S. M. Sener, Esq., described the bridge at McCall's Ferry, which was completed the latter part of the year 1815, or very early in 1816. Despite the fact that a capable engineer was employed, the bridge was destroyed by ice in the early part of 1818.

The Pennsylvania Gazette, a newspaper published in Lancaster, under date of Tuesday, March 10th, 1818, contained the following:

"The beautiful bridge over the Susquehanna, at McCall's Ferry, was totally carried away by ice on Monday, March 2nd. We understand that floating ice came down the river in such a vast body as entirely to choke the channel above the bridge, and that the succeeding masses, driven on by the pressure, increased the height of the ice dam until it rose to the wood work, and continued rising until the bridge was fairly lifted from its pillars. At this moment, the bursting of the ice dam, which had gradually accumulated until it rose nearly 60 feet, appeared to be the signal of destruction, when all gave way with one tremendous crash.

"This bridge was one of the wonders of architecture. The channel over which it was thrown is narrow, and for a space of 380 feet the depth of water has never been ascertained. To construct a bridge at this place required, of course, an arch of 380 feet span, as no pier could be founded but on the rocks which borders this unfathomable gulf. To the genius of Mr. [Theodore] Burr, the architect, these circumstances must have presented considerable difficulties, but he overcame them in a manner that justly excited admiration. The stupendous structure which he raised seemed to the wondering eyes of the observer to 'hang suspended in mid air'; and, from its firmness, appeared as if it would remain a lasting monument of the genius of the architect; but from a cause which human foresight could not apprehend and genius could provide no barrier against, it has, in one moment, like a rainbow in the heavens, faded from sight and left no trace of its existence."

A meeting was held at McCall's Ferry, on Thursday, March 19th. William Calhoun was appointed chairman, and Henry Brien and Richard Porter secretaries.¹ The following action was taken:

"Resolved, That we recommend to the president, directors and company of McCall's bridge to meet as soon as convenient for them at McCall's Ferry, in order to consult on measures to rebuild the bridge at that place.

"Resolved, That from the anxiety we feel in re-building the bridge, we recommend as early a meeting as possible, and public notice of the meeting to be given in the Lancaster and York papers, and such others as may be thought proper."

A meeting of the stockholders of the company, incorporated for the purpose of erecting a bridge over the Susquehanna at or near McCall's Ferry, in the county of Lancaster, was held at the house of David Lewis, in the borough of West Chester, on Saturday, April 4th. Jesse John, Esq., was appointed chairman, and Ziba Pyle secretary.² The following resolutions were unanimously adopted:

"That the Susquehanna bridge at McCall's Ferry, which lately has been damaged by the rise of the river at the breaking up of the ice, ought to be repaired with as little delay as possible; and that measures be taken immediately to raise the necessary funds to accomplish that purpose.

"That Moses Rankin and Alexander Porter, of York county, Joel Lightner and Henry Brien, of Lancaster county, and James Wollaston, Esq., of Chester county, or any two of them, be and are hereby appointed commissioners to open books for receiving subscriptions, and therein enter the following: We, whose names are hereunto subscribed, do promise to pay to the president, directors and company for erecting a bridge over the Susquehanna, at or near McCall's Ferry, the sum of \$5.00, at the time of subscribing, for every share of stock in the said company set opposite to our respective names; and the residue thereof, at the rate of \$100.00 for each share, in such manner and proportions, and at such times, as shall be determined by the president and directors, chosen in pursuance of an Act of General Assembly entitled, 'An Act to authorize the Governor of this Commonwealth to incorporate a company for erecting a bridge over the river Susquehanna, at or near McCall's Ferry, in the county of Lancaster.' *Provided*, That no money shall be demanded of the said subscribers by the president and directors until the sum of \$30,000.00 shall be subscribed. Witness our hands this day of in the year of our Lord 1818; and they are hereby requested to proceed, without delay, to receive subscriptions for the additional stock of said company.

"That the aforesaid commissioners do open the books at McCall's Ferry on the 25th day of April, or as soon thereafter as practicable, of which public notice ought to be given; and at such other times and places as they may think expedient, and continue the same open until the aforesaid sum be therein subscribed.

"That whenever the aforesaid sum shall be subscribed, the commissioners shall inform the president and directors thereof, and deliver over the books and amount by them received, after deducting the necessary expenses."

The Lancaster Journal, of Wednesday, May 6th, 1818, contained an announcement that the stockholders were notified that the annual meeting for electing officers would be held at the public house near the Ferry, on Tuesday, May 19th, 1818, at ten o'clock in the morning. Abraham Baily's name was appended to the notice, as treasurer.

The commissioners appointed to open books for receiving subscriptions for the re-building of McCall's Ferry bridge, informed the public that they would attend at the house of David Lewis, in West Chester, at the house of Isaac Carpenter, in Marshleton, and at the house of George Smith, at McCall's Ferry, on Saturday, May 16th; at the house of Robert Ramsey, in York county, on the

18th; at the house of Col. Jacob Slough, in Lancaster, and at the house of Col. Street, in Hartford county, on the 20th; at the house of Joseph Sample, in Strasburg, on the 21st; and at Philip House-keeper's on the 26th.³

It is quite certain that the commissioners were unable to secure sufficient capital, as another bridge was not erected. Subsequent issues of local papers contain no references to the company.

¹ The Pennsylvania Gazette, March 31st, 1818.

² Lancaster Journal, April 13th, 1818.

³ The Pennsylvania Gazette, May 5th, 1818.

John Rannie, Celebrated Ventriloquist in Lancaster

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

The Lancaster Journal, of Saturday, June 26th, 1802, contained a brief announcement as follows:

"We are desired to inform the public that Mr. Rannie, the celebrated ventriloquist, will be in Lancaster in a few days."

The next issue of the Lancaster Journal, dated Saturday, July 3rd, 1802, contained the following advertisement:

EXHIBITION

"On Saturday evening, July the third, at Mr. Fisher's long room, sign of the King of Prussia.

VENTRILLOQUISM,

BY MR. RANNIE, FROM EUROPE,

"Whose performances in New York and Philadelphia, from their singularity, have commanded the admiration of even the most enlightened characters. This natural curiosity, which has excited the greatest wonder in most parts of Europe, enables the performer to make an object appear to speak at any given distance which the dimensions of the room will admit of; he causes the voice of a child to be heard from various parts of the room, and to give responses to whatever questions he proposes. This singular power of ventriloquism will be displayed by Mr. Rannie without any deception or confederacy, in a manner beyond the power of words to describe. We have no account of any real ventriloquists but three since the woman of Endor. This extraordinary power of speaking from the belly is altogether a natural gift, and impossible to be acquired by anyone.

"Also will be displayed his surprising, imitations of birds and beasts, effected by the power of his own voice, and allowed by all to be a great curiosity.

"During the evening will be a curious dialogue with an old Scotchman molested at night.