

# DATE STONES.

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As a rule, the early German settlers in Pennsylvania were not much given to self-laudation or praise. They were too busy in cutting down the forests, tearing out the stumps and carting off the stones that often covered their lands to give much attention to less material things, especially to such as seemed to carry a certain air or degree of vanity with them. They were, in short, practical rather than ideal or aesthetic, and how to increase their estates and leave something behind them for their children engaged their attention rather than the non-essentials which gratified the eye or satisfied the vanity, without carrying with them any positive benefit.

There was, however, one particular in which they seem to have departed from this common rule of their everyday life. When they first came into the country the conditions of existence were hard. All they could do was to build their log cabins and make themselves as comfortable in those humble dwellings as circumstances would allow. It was a strenuous struggle for existence. They realized it, and struggled along as they best could, hoping and looking forward with confidence to that better

The writer avails himself of this opportunity to express his thanks to Mr. George Steinman and S. M. Sener, Esq., for the privilege of examining and selecting from their large and invaluable collection of archaeological and other materials relative to our local history for use in the preparation of this paper. Also, to Mr. F. S. Klinger, for similar favors, generously tendered. It is a pleasure to know there are those among us who for years have been untiring in collecting and preserving the memorials of other days which the wasting tooth of time is rapidly sweeping from sight and memory.

day which they trusted and believed was in store for them.

And their hopes did not, in most cases, go unrealized. In the fulness of time the early difficulties were surmounted. The clearings in the forests grew larger. Larger barns were required to house their crops. Other buildings were needed to shelter their cattle, and these also were erected. All the buildings took on an air of prosperity. More and more cattle were grazing in the meadows and on the uplands. Drove of swine roamed through the woods, almost as wild as the beasts native to the forests themselves, fattening on the mast that fell from the trees and ripening to the Christmas season, when they found their way into the ample larder, where the provisions for the ensuing year were stored.

After all these things generally came the crowning work of the whole—the pleasant task that had long been contemplated, but which had been deferred until the means justified the expenditure—the building of a new house, the crowning opus of all that had gone before. If this task was long delayed, as it generally was, ample amends were generally made when the auspicious time finally arrived. It is surprising how amply, how well and how expensively the new homestead was builded. Something of this is to be seen in the vicinity of Lancaster, where building stone was both good and abundant, but to realize this fact in the fullest measure one must go into the sandstone regions of the northeastern part of Lancaster county and into the adjacent districts of Lebanon and Berks. In the red sandstone belt existing there not only was a most suitable material found in the utmost abundance, but so easily procurable and so easily worked under the mason's hammer that the well-to-do pion-

eer hardly ever thought of resorting for building material for the outside of his dwelling to any place but the nearby, easily-worked sandstone quarry. Although acres of the best building timber in the world stood on his farm, its presence, except for inside finishing, was usually rejected, and the more enduring, as well as the more imposing-looking, sandstone house took its place.

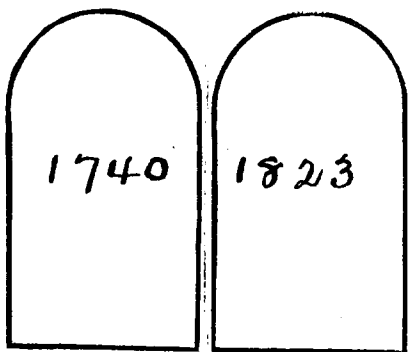
There being no limit to the amount of the building material, the pioneer, as a general thing, availed himself of his opportunities to build a house of the amplest proportions. Never was I so impressed with this fact as recently during the course of a two-days' drive through the region already mentioned. Most of the more pretentious houses of the period, beginning, say, about 1750, and running down into the nineteenth century, are constructed of the beautiful sandstone found in the South Mountain ranges, and in the minor spurs of that elevation. In fact, there are few farms on which this stone cannot be found. The shades vary, and it is not unusual to find buildings in which the darker and lighter shades are harmoniously blended, giving a pleasing effect to the whole. These houses, of course, varied with the means of the men who built them. Generally, they were modest structures, often of but a single story and an ample attic, but not infrequently they were of more ample dimensions, two stories high, with an attic of great size, making them, in fact, three-story structures. Most of them had porches, at first small in size, but later extending along the entire length of the building, and sometimes along two sides of it. The area covered by the structures was unusually large. Most of them were what we now call double houses; that is, there were two rooms of large dimensions on the ground

floor, while between them was a hall, nearly as large, that could easily accommodate the entire family, however large, for in those early days large families were the rule, and not the exception, as now, and the doctrine of race suicide had not yet been heard of. One is tempted to wonder why our forefathers built such large houses, far larger they now seem to us than were necessary to accommodate the families living in them. Perhaps they were intended to accommodate a married son or daughter also, until such time as the young people had accumulated means to branch out for themselves and build homes elsewhere. Perhaps, too, the huge fire-sides that were nearly always to be found in at least one of these rooms, and often in two, occupying nearly an entire side of them, rendered it necessary to build big houses to accommodate them.

This brings me to the matter which led to the writing of this brief paper. The man who built one of these goodly structures was naturally proud of the performance. He was not disposed to hide his work under a bushel even if he could; (this is an American bull, not an Irish one)), and, consequently, he was anxious to let the world know who did it, and when. He was not ashamed of his work, therefore, he carved his name in stone and fixed it immovably in the heavy walls of the structure, to be seen and known by all men. Here we have the reason for the existence of what is now known as the date stone. Not only did he put his own name upon that date stone, but he was quite willing and anxious that his better half should also share in the credit and honor of the performance. Hence the general character of the date or building stones was something like this:

BUILT BY  
HENRY AND  
FANNY STEINER,  
1765.

This stone was generally of sandstone, although at a later period marble was used. The stone was inserted in the second-story front wall of the house, between two windows, the most conspicuous place on the entire building, so that all passing by or approaching it could see and read who was the builder. Not all houses, however, had these conspicuous announcements. Some were dateless,



BUILT BY MARTIN AND ANN  
MEYLIN.

owing, perhaps, to the greater modesty of the owners, the additional cost, or lest it might be construed into a matter of pride and self-glorification, which latter was often charged against those who had done so, especially by the stricter class of the "Sect People." We read that when Martin and Ann Meylin built that "palace of sandstone" in West Lampeter township, in 1740, one of the stateliest of all the early houses erected in Lancaster county, with its gambrel roof and shingled cornices around the differ-

ent stories, the Mennonite Bishop of that d. y, Hans Tschantz, with the elders, repaired to the humble log cottage hard by the stately mansion, and they then and there interrogated Martin Meylin, the builder and owner, to declare upon his conscience what was his purpose in erecting so stately a dwelling. Friend Martin declared that his sole purpose was to consult only the comfort of himself and family and not with any sinister purpose.



#### THE STIEGEL DATE STONE.

The brethren told him his mansion was too showy for an humble follower of Menno Simon. The question then arose what should be done in the case—whether severe censure would be sufficient or whether he ought not to be suspended from church privileges for his presumption. After a full and free discussion, and mutual forbearance and concessions, it was decided that a kindly reprimand was

all the circumstances required, which, being then and there administered, the matter was dropped and the brethren parted in peace.

I now submit for your inspection a stone which some time during the year 1904 was found in Elizabeth township, in the northeastern part of the county. As nearly as can be learned, it was turned up by a farmer while plowing. It was sold by him for a small sum to that hunter and seller of curios, Miss Spangler, of Ephrata, and by her placed on sale among her archaeological and other bric-a-brac. S. M. Sener, of our Society, saw it there, and it naturally interested him. The price asked was \$2, and he got an option on it. He decided, however, that he did not want it, and his interest in it ceased. Later a gentleman from Harrisburg saw and bought it, and, as the Harrisburg papers have announced, it will be placed in the new State Museum which it is proposed to establish at Harrisburg.

It will be observed that this stone, in size 16 inches long, 11 inches wide, and 4 inches thick, is highly ornate, in which it differs from most of the other date stones. The tulip, both in its upright form and with the petals flattened, is very conspicuous in various places on the stone. So also are the hearts, three in number. Because this piece of date stone, for it is broken and incomplete, was found near where one of the furnaces operated by William Henry Stiegel was located, the inference has been drawn that it may have been carved at his instance and been part of a house in which Stiegel built or lived. That may be so, but there is no proof to sustain the theory. The ornate character of the carvings cut on the stone bears some resemblance to those to be found on the stove plates cast at Elizabeth Furnace about that period, and

seem to suggest that the designer of the latter may have also designed the former.

To indicate this relationship—if we may so call it—more nearly, an illustration of a Stiegel stove plate is also presented. Even the untrained eye will note at a glance the two articles as belonging to the same era or period, and a general similarity that

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AN EARLY STIEGEL STOVE PLATE  
(Owned by R. Blickenderfer).

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seems to suggest that either the designer of both was one and the same person, or if they were the work of two men, that the one copied from the other.

If it be claimed, however, that this stone is one from Stiegel's residence at Elizabeth Furnace, the reply is that the stately mansion occupied by him about 1760 is still standing near the site of the old furnace, and that there is no evidence that he had any other residence for himself there at that or any other time.

But such illustrations or carvings were very common at that period, and even down to as recently as the first half of the nineteenth century. Their

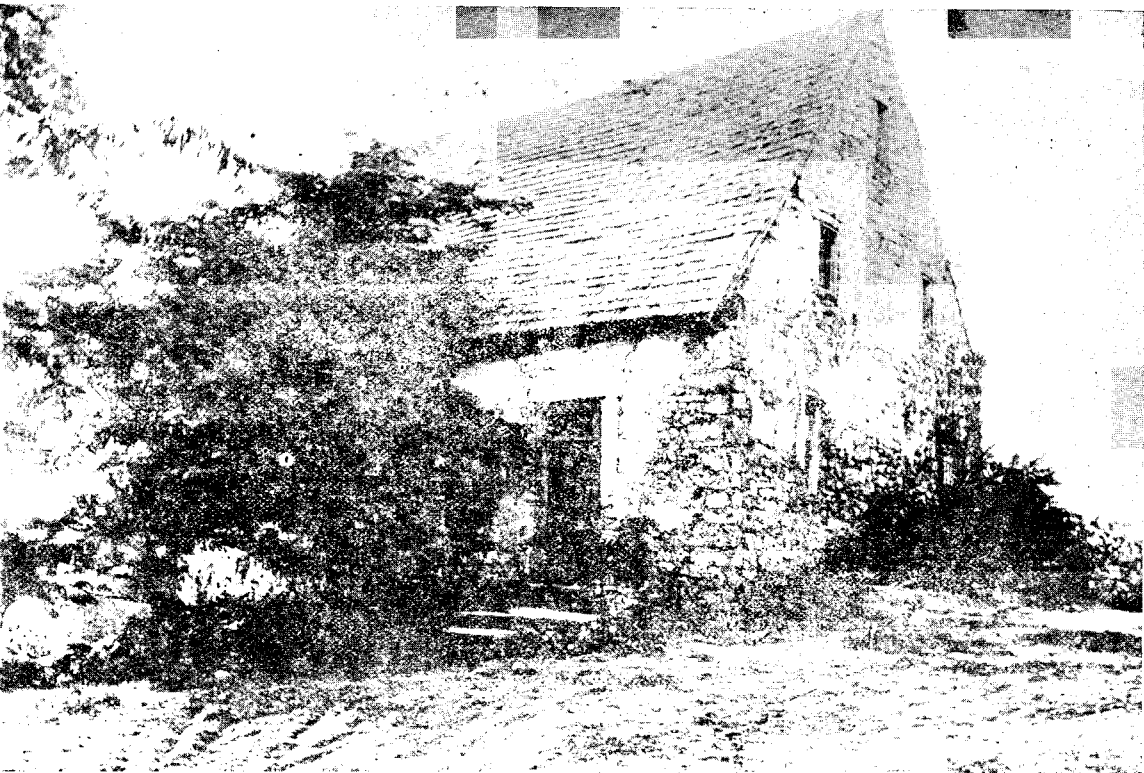


origin is easily traced back to the Fatherland, and still further to the mediaeval art of illumination practiced by monks and scribes of those earlier times. Throughout the German counties of Eastern Pennsylvania there are hundreds of examples of these illuminated writings. Almost everyone here present must have seen some specimens of this kind of work. They were done in this country as a general thing by schoolmasters and clergymen. Often they were put on the fly leaves of Testaments and Bibles, but more frequently they are found in the form of "Taufscheine," or baptismal certificates. These are generally in the form of written text in the centre of the paper with illuminated borders adorned with birds, tulips, hearts and flowers of many kinds, painted by hand, in green, red, yellow, brown and other colors. The exact significance of the tulips and hearts on these certificates is not clearly understood. A leaflet, with hearts painted on it, has the following sentiment written in the heart: "Die Herz mein, soll dir allein O lieber Jesu sein," which seems to give it a religious significance. These baptismal certificates are frequently of great genealogical significance. One of large size and brilliantly illuminated supplied me with a complete record of my ancestry on the maternal side as far back as the early part of the eighteenth century, doubtless to the first immigrant. This art was practiced by the Sisters of the Ephrata Community, many of their illuminated books and other examples being still in existence. The "Zionitischer Rosen Garten" and "Paradisisches Wunder-Spiel" made there are fine examples of this art.

Nor were the Stiegel stove plates the first time these adornments appeared in such a connection. Durham

stove plates, made as early as 1750, years before Stiegel cast his, were illustrated by similar symbols representing Adam and Eve, Potiphar's Wife, The Dance of Death and other figures, such as flaming hearts, tulips, vines and flowers. Much of the Pennsylvania earthenware of the early part of the last century was similarly ornamented. But this is a digression called out by the various designs on this old fractured stone, and I now go back to my more immediate subject.

A very elaborate article might have been prepared concerning these date or building stones, if the needed time was given to it, but, as this is but a make-shift article, prepared hurriedly that we might not be without some entertainment this evening, I must content myself by mentioning a few others that have been sought out as examples. While the one already described departs from the usual style of these memorials in being at once artistic and ornamental in its general design, and, therefore, more than usually valuable, it loses somewhat of its value in not indicating what it really represents, or was designed to represent. The usual date stone tells its own story. It is in reality the history of the house in whose walls it is imbedded and tells us generally who was the builder and when the building was done. That fact is especially valuable from an historical point of view. History, as we know, is largely built on dates. A house that has the date of its erection carved in stone upon it derives an added interest from that fact. How often have we stood before a structure bearing the marks of age and wondered when the logs or stones were piled on each other. The date stone answers our unuttered desire and our wish is gratified.



THE HERR HOUSE.

The earliest house built in Lancaster county that is still standing, so far as the authentic records go, is the dilapidated, but venerable, structure seen in the accompanying cut. The legend carved in the prominent oak lintel over the front door tells the story; here it is:

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It was built by the Rev. Christian Herr, a minister of the Mennonite persuasion, and one of the earliest settlers in the county, having come hither from the Palatinate in 1709. The house stands—or stood several years ago—several miles south of Lancaster, and about half a mile east of Willow Street. Family pride ought to suggest its repair and its future preservation.

Sometimes date stones contained other matter aside from the name of the builder and the date. A fine example of this kind is to be found in the walls of the stately and old mansion, built almost 150 years ago, and still standing in West Cocalico township, near Schoeneck. It is known as the old Bricker homestead, and the manorial estate that once lay around it embraced 800 acres of land. On this splendid estate the owner built a house about forty feet square,

of the sandstone so abundant nearby.

It is one of the few houses still to be found in the county that are covered with heavy tiles. In the usual place, in the south side front, is the date stone bearing the following:

"Gott gesegne dieses Haus  
Und ales was da geget ein und  
aus.  
Gott gesegne alee Sampt  
Und da Zu das ganze Lant  
Gott allein die Ehr  
Sonst Keinen Menschen mehr  
Anno 1759 Jahrs  
Peter Bricker Elizabeth Brick-  
erin."

Which may be freely rendered into English as follows:

God bless this house;  
And all that enters or goes out.  
God bless all the people  
And also all the land.  
To God alone be the honor  
And to no one else.

A. D. 1759.

Peter Bricker. Elizabeth Bricker, (his wife).

In and around Ephrata are still to be seen a number of the old erections with their date stones. On the date stone in the front wall of the old Seventh Day Baptist Grist Mill, now owned by a Mr. Metzger, on the Cocalico creek, half a mile west of Ephrata, is to be seen the following:

Deo propitio restauratus pro  
bono publico impensis Ano  
MDCCLXXXIV  
post ordinem fundatum L mo  
Fundator  
isque obitum XVII.

The stone is a shale, 3 feet by 2 feet in size. The mill is built of limestone. The walls are in a good

state of preservation except in one place, where several fissures are to be seen, the result of overloading the mill with grain some years ago. There is a barn on the same premises, built of sandstone, which has a date stone in one of the gables bearing the inscription 1805 in Arabic numerals. It is a most substantial structure, and after its hundred years of existence is still in an excellent state of preservation. Even the original binding or pointing on the walls is still intact, showing the excellent character of the workmanship in those early days. The mortar is said to have been made by a peculiar process in vogue a century ago. The lime used in making the cement was slaked, and then buried in the ground for a long time before it was added to the mixture. This mill is said to have been seventeen years in building. I may mention here that something like this is still practiced in some European and other countries in the process of mortar-making. The lime is slaked and then made into large mounds where it hardens and is allowed to remain a long time before being finally used in the intended work.

On a date stone imbedded in the front wall of 'Squire Samuel D. Erb's dwelling, located at the crossroads between Ephrata and Lincoln, is the following:

HENRY MILLER, A. D.  
MDCCLXIII

SUSANA MARGAR  
HIS WIFE

This house is also a large and imposing one, built of sandstone, but the walls were roughcasted in 1860. It is

in a fine state of preservation, containing all the original timbers in the interior of the house and which are of very large size. When the house was remodeled in 1860 an effort was made to preserve all the original features and to add only such conveniences as would bring it up to date. The old-fashioned spiral staircase, winding its way to the attic, was also preserved intact. A sample of the solidity with which these old houses were constructed may be seen in the timbers used in constructing and supporting the roof. The wall plates, tie beams, principal rafters, king posts and common rafters are all of hewn timbers and of the same style and size as those used in the construction of the old-fashioned Swiss barns. The house was at one period of its history one of the leading hotels in the northern end of the county. It may not be amiss to mention that the present owner, who at the age of eighty-four still lives in the homestead, is the great-great-grandson of the builder and original owner of the house.

In an old sandstone house located about a half-mile west of Ephrata, on the road leading from Ephrata to Akron, are to be seen two date stones with the following inscriptions:

JACOB KIMMELL  
A. D. 1795

ESTHER KIMMELL  
MDCCVC

This building is also well preserved. It, like the Erb house, was once used as an ordinary. The property is at present occupied by Mr. Martin Irvin.

On the stone mansion house at the Clare Point Stock Farm is a date

stone carrying only the date of erection:

MDCCLXXXIII.

A short distance northwest of the Cloister buildings is a handsome stone dwelling that has more than once attracted my attention. It is the residence of Mr. Jacob Konigmacher. In the front wall is a handsomely carved stone with the usual inscription:

JOHN MILLER  
A. D. 1777.

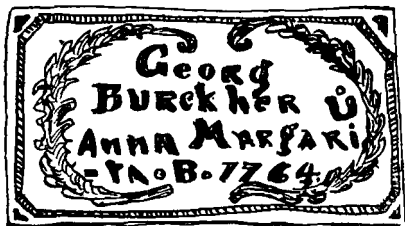
The house was built by Henry Miller, for his son, John. The latter sold it to a Mr. Martin, who in turn sold it to Dr. Jacob Konigmacher, the grandfather of the present owner and occupant. The front wall of the house is of dressed sandstone, fluted, and the windows have stone arches, each with a beautifully-carved keystone. Like the Erb house, it has a simple, but attractive, style of architecture characteristic of the Colonial period of American architecture. The walls are all solidly built and so excellent was the workmanship that there are seldom any signs of decay in these old dwellings. One large fireplace on the first floor and two on the second, with their carved mantles, are among the interesting features of the Konigmacher house.

Not the least interesting fact connected with the Erb and Konigmacher houses, both built by Henry Miller, is the fact that German masons, Hessians, who lived in that vicinity, built them. Mrs. Rebecca Connell, of Ephrata, who is a direct descendant of Henry Miller, is the authority for this statement, the fact having come down direct from her ancestors.



No house was more conspicuous for a century and a-half in the architecture of Lancaster city than the stone residence located on the northwest corner of North Duke and Orange streets. It was a fine specimen of the pre-revolutionary style, and even down to the day when it was torn down to make room for St. Paul's Reformed Church was admired by all who were acquainted with it. For many years it was the residence of Dr. John L. Atlee. The following is a fac-simile of the date stone in its walls:

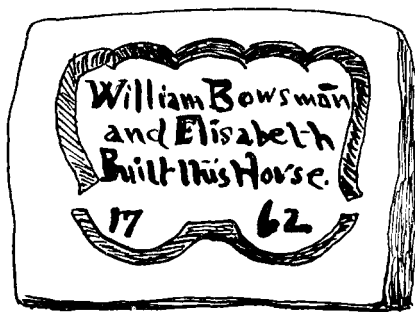
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Lancaster, no doubt, had a number of houses with date stones during the eighteenth century, but nearly all of them have been swept away by the onward march of progress. The most conspicuous one still left of which I have any knowledge is the Bausman house, on the north side of the second square of East King street, two doors above the People's National Bank. The house is built of sandstone and is still clean looking and handsome.

Immediately under the eaves of the roof, on the front wall, is a fine date stone, bearing this inscription:



The stone is handsomely carved and it is a good example of the architecture of the ante-Revolutionary period.

Old Trinity Lutheran Church also has two stone tablets, inserted high up in the wall on the Duke street side of the church. One of these is in German and reads as follows:



The other is in Latin, as follows:

"Hoc Templum ss Trinitati  
Ecclesia Evangelica Sacrat,  
A. C. MDCCLXI.

Churches of a recent date commonly have inscriptions giving the denominational character of the church, as well as the date of erection. In addition, they have the usual corner-stone. The Reformed Church, in New Holland, has carved over the keystone of a window of the south wall of the building the simple date of erection, "1779." This has a personal interest for me, because my father, then a lad of sixteen years, "dipped" the bricks, as was customary then, preparatory to their being laid in the walls by the brick masons.

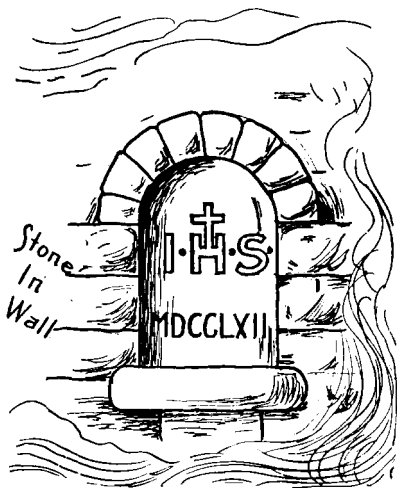
The Moravian Church was one of the early places of worship erected in Lancaster. This church was torn down years ago to make room for a more modern structure. It was built of limestone, and the date stone has been placed in the new building on the Market street side of the church, level with the second story. It is an ornate affair and well worth preservation. The following cut is an excellent representation of it:



St. Mary's Catholic Church, of this city, an old stone structure torn down

in 1880; St. Peter's, at Elizabethtown, erected 1794, and St. Peter's, at Columbia, erected 1828, were all examples of old-style architecture. The date stone from St. Mary's has disappeared, but the following cut is a good representation of it:

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One of the earliest hotel buildings erected in Lancaster was the hostelry on West King street known as the "Old Lamb Tavern" which was standing on the site of Nos. 38 and 40 in the present numeration of the street. It was torn down in 1869. It had two elaborate date stones, which are still in existence and which are herewith presented.

Nearly as old as the Lamb Tavern was the structure so long known as Shoher's Hotel, which stood on the northwest corner of North Queen and West Orange streets, the present site of the Y. M. C. A. building. The date



stone was an elaborately carved one, a good representation of which is given by the subjoined cut:



On the Benjamin Miller farm, in East Lampeter township, stands an

old stone building known as the Espen-shade house, built about 1750, and believed to have at one time been used as a meeting-house, with a stone bearing the following inscription, which displays several symbols, apparently a saw and a wheel, which may denote the occupation of the builders. It offers a fine opportunity for antiquarian speculation:



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Daniel Harman May 12 1750.

John Hair ~~Mar~~ 12 50 & ©

Daniel Lefors 1750

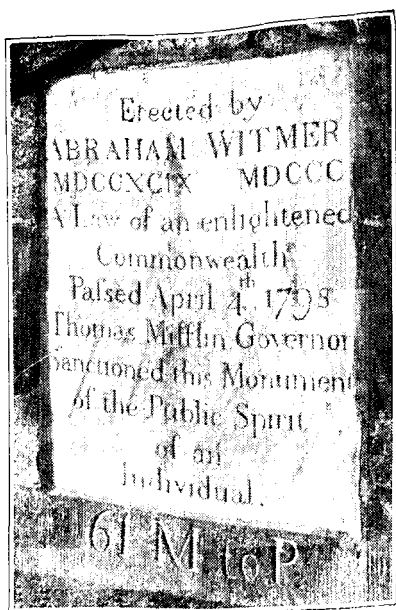
M. Mylin

I. H. N. S.  

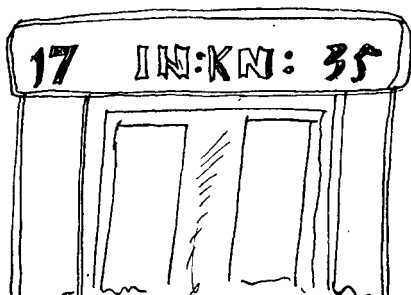
T. B. M.

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One of the oldest as well as largest of the stone bridges is the one spanning the Conestoga river a little east of the city boundary line. Its erection was due to the enterprise of a single individual, Mr. Abraham Witmer, who undertook its erection with his own resources in 1799, and completed it in 1800. The State Legislature permitted him, by a special act, to charge toll for animals and vehicles crossing it. The bridge was finally sold to the county of Lancaster, after which the payment of toll ceased. It is still in an excellent state of preservation and bids fair to outlive the present century. The date stone is built into a prominent place in the wall.



On the Tomlinson farm, hard by the new Water Works, stood an old log house known as the Rudysill house, over the door of which was carved the following inscription:



On Henry Miller's Mill, on the Little Conestoga creek, about one mile east of Petersburg, is a tablet stone with the following inscription:

JACOB OBERHOLTZER  
CATHARINE OBERHOLTZER  
1792

Immediately above it is another with the following:

Wer Gott vertraut  
hat wohl gebaut  
in himmel und auf erde.  
1792

Near the mill stands an old stone dwelling with a stone tablet inscribed as follows:

CHRISTIAN OBERHOLTZER,  
MAGDALENE OBERHOLTZER  
1769

At Bridgeport, on the Philadelphia turnpike, in East Lampeter township, stood, until a few years ago, but now torn down, a house with a stone containing the following humorous rhyme:

"Wer will bauen au die strassen  
Mus lose mauler plaudern  
lassen"

which may be thus translated:

"Whoever builds upon a street  
Sets gossips to chatter when they  
meet."

In Stoneroad's mill, near the West End Park, is fixed a tablet with the following legend:



Erbaut von Andreas Kauffman  
und Veronica K. M. Anno 1770.

On the old "Relay House," corner of North Prince and Walnut streets, is a plain stone with this inscription:

NICOLAUS HITZELBERGER  
MAGDALENA. H. 1766.

In the Masonic Temple in this city are two stones of white marble inscribed as follows:

MASONIC HALL

FOUNDED 1798

In tearing down the old stone house on West King street which was located on what is now the McCormick estate, there was found over the door in large letters:

1774

There was torn down on Church street a few years ago an old building which contained a stone inscribed:

1760

In a property owned by W. A. Strine, on West King street, above Mulberry, was found, a few years ago, an old door lintel on which was carved

1745

and an inscription in German, no longer remembered.

Two of the most elaborate date stones we have found are imbedded in the walls of the stone mansion house on the property owned by Lancaster city, commonly known as Ranck's Mill, on the Conestoga River, a short distance beyond the city limits, on the east. The stones are in the front walls, a window separating them. They differ from all the others I have seen in that the inscriptions are in raised letters, the others being sunken or cut into the stone. The stones show very elaborate carving, and the legend on them is as follows:

ANDREAS GRAFF  
17

CATHARINA GRAFFIN  
67

The Andreas Graff mentioned above was, I think, the founder of the little hamlet known in the history of our city as Groffstown. This little place a century or more ago had a special tax-assessment, and I have seen a list of the taxables, which were, as I remember, twelve in number.

We look in vain for date stones in the houses built by the early Quakers and Englishmen. I have gone to some trouble to ascertain whether any of the famous mansions in and around Philadelphia had them, but have found none. Penn's famous "Slate Roof House," sometimes called the "Letitia House," "Lemon Hill," Robert Morris' mansion, "Stenton," James Logan's fine country residence, "Bush Hill," the Hamilton home, "the Woodlands," the Shippen, Wistar, Norris and other residences, do not seem to have had these date stones. One exception to this rule deserves to go on

record. When John Bartram built his modest home in his celebrated botanical grounds, he put in the gable a stone with this legend:

"JOHN AND ANN BARTRAM,  
1731."

On the east side of the house above one of the front windows, and where his study was, the creed of the owner was set forth on another tablet, reading as follows:

'Tis God alone, Almighty Lord,  
The Holy One by me adored.  
JOHN BARTRAM, 1770.

Francis Daniel Pastorius, the leader of the Germantown colony, placed the following inscription over the door opening into his early cave dwelling:

"Parva Domus sed amica  
Bonis procul este Profanii.

The above may be translated thus:  
"A modest home, yet pleasing to good men—let evil-doers keep their distance."

William Penn, it is said, had a hearty laugh when he first saw it.

These are a few examples of the date stones once so common among our German ancestors. They could, of course, have been greatly duplicated, if time for search had permitted. The subject is a very interesting one, and somebody with time and patience should take it up and deal with it more fully.

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Litt.D.

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