

The Christmas Belsnickle

by

Nada Gray

Antics, Belsnickles, Callithumpians, Fantasticals, and Mummers are names nearly forgotten. Yet they were once colorful and noisy additions to the celebration of Christmas and New Year's Day. Brought to this country by English and German settlers, these traditions have faded over time through acculturation.

Alfred L. Shoemaker in *Christmas in Pennsylvania: A Folk-Cultural Study* (1959), credits Episcopalians with bringing and fostering the mumming tradition to the Quaker city of Philadelphia. Originally a band of costumed and masked street thespians, they would present outdoor performances with the anticipation of monetary rewards. The costumes represented characters in a play, and were often satirical. The revelers were invited to share food and drink before traveling with their noisemakers and horns to the next household. Too many thespians, too many households, and too many drinks led to increased boisterous behavior, and city officials sought to ban the custom. When this mumming tradition was moved to New Year's Day, the performers were known as Antics, Callithumpians, Fantasticals, and Belsnickels. They were most often found in rural areas. However, Philadelphia remains the center for mummers and they are currently known for their string band music and fanciful costumes, as well as street theatrics.

Shoemaker and Snyder cite newspaper accounts beginning in the 1830s, and continuing well into the 1900s. Locally, Antics, Callithumpians, and Fantasticals appeared annually on New Year's Day in Paxtonville, according to Fay McAfee Winey, in an 1970 article published in *Pennsylvania Folklife*. Residents would toil for days, crafting costumes to mask their identity, even from their own children. They would go to the train station, mill around, and tempt travelers to try and to guess their true identities. Often, they would ride the train to Beavertown, presumably continuing their high jinks, and return on the next scheduled run. It appears the children were left in the hands of neighbors who

abstained from the good-natured fun. Winey said that the day was also known as Belsnickling Day. It was apparently an attempt to hide from the dreaded Belsnickle, who would return that day to see if you were still being good. Winey writes it was really a day set aside to break rules and have fun. She states that one young lady got the tongue lashing of her life at bedtime, because she recognized her mother at the train station, sharing the news with the crowd. Winey's familiarity with the custom suggests she, too, might have been a participant.



Belsnickle as drawn by R. D. Dunkleberger. *Christmas in Pennsylvania; a Folk-Cultural Study* by Alfred L. Shoemaker, p. 75. The Pennsylvania Folklife Society Collection at Ursinus College. Used with permission.

In addition to masked and costumed participants performing at the train station, groups of masked men (often black-faced) would gallop about the countryside blowing horns, frightening children by riding close to schools (if in session), sledding, or ice skating. This was accompanied by the threat that the Belsnickle would put you in his sack and carry you off. Reports of this practice are found in newspapers from Danville, New Berlin, and Montour. Many editors, though not all, also expressed relief when the custom ceased and the day became “moderate, pleasant and decorous.”

Clair Groover recalled riding about the Union County countryside from farm to farm, with masked and costumed friends, just for “devilment”. They too, carried horns and noisemakers.

However, the Belsnickle or Pelsnickle (Nicholas in furs) has a more complex history. Noted Christmas historian Phillip Snyder, in December 25th The Joys of Christmas Past (1985) reported the appearance of Belsnickle in German celebrations, but gives no details of its antecedents. Speculation holds that Rupert, the groom that attended Saint Nicholas, became the Belsnickle when Protestants rejected Nicholas. Yet it is only speculation. His appearance and mission varied from time to time and from community to community. Dressed in ragged clothes, ratty furs, and many times black-faced, he traveled alone about the countryside. Sometimes, he came on Saint Nicholas Day (December 6). It was said that if you were not good you would be carried away in his sack and children cringed when they heard the bells signaling his approach. I believe it was a very clever way to reinforce the “you’d better be good” refrain of parents prior to the holidays.

Traditionally, he came at Christmastime. Harold Danowsky remembered well his annual visit in Kelly Township. He would rattle his chains and thump on the door. An adult would offer him entrance, while the children scurried to hide behind their mother (or whatever furniture was available). The forbidding figure would toss coveted sweets and nuts on the floor, requesting information as to who had been good, and who had not. Harold recalled being unable to resist the temptation to snatch sweets, prior to being granted permission. He recounted crawling under the copper wash kettle lid and scuttling in turtle fashion to the center of the room, grabbing what he could, while being protected from the forcible lashing of the switch (delivered by the Belsnickle). Most often, the masked and costumed figure was a relative or friend.

In some communities, Belsnickle was the gift-giver as well as the enforcer, bringing either presents or lumps of coal in stockings, for those whose behavior merited one or the other. He remained a person to be pleased, just like our modern day, Santa Claus.

Henry Harbaugh, a Lewisburg minister, extolled the joys of Christmas

celebrations in his publication, "The Guardian." For years he tried convincing Protestant churches to incorporate secular aspects of the holiday into church activities. He wrote plays for Sunday school performances, songs and poetry. According to George Folkers, a Bucknell language professor, it was a poorly written sort of poetry, translated below by Folkers. In this poem, Harbaugh's description of a Belsnickle visit, closely parallels Danowsky's story:

O, do you know that ugly, dirty fellow?
 Brr! Is he supposed to be human?
 Whoever can believe that he is human, can do so,
 To me, he resembles too closely the Evil one!

Just look at his eyes, his nose-good Lord!
 He opens and closes his mouth like a pair of scissors;
 He has a tail like a steer, that he does,
 And a hairy pelt like a bear.

If he comes to your house, there'll be noise enough,
 He'll be looking for good-for-nothing children!
 And when he finds one, he comes at once to the point,
 And thrashes quite thoroughly the sinners.

He takes up a position with his fearsome cane
 And roars his threatening words;
 The children become quite suddenly good
 And begin fervently to pray.

If one is, as most often the case, mischievous-
 If little Fritz mocks his mother;
 I'll bet, he won't laugh at Belsnickel's cane
 He'll beg soon for a change in the weather.

Now Belsnickel's violently shaking his bag
 Cakes and nuts must fall from it,
 Good children can take them, bad ones get whacked
 By Belsnickel's cane where it does good.

I've learned something from old Belsnickel
 And that I will never forget:
 As you sow, so shall you reap
 The fruits of your labor at last.

Another Belsnickling custom prevailed in rural areas until the late 1930s, or perhaps into the 1940s. Groups of young people would dress in costumes and masks to hide their identities. It was common for boys to represent girls and vice versa. So attired, they would call on neighbors to see if they could fool them. Invited in for cookies, popcorn, cakes and cider, the masked visitors would enjoy themselves while the guessing games continued. These social visits were greatly anticipated during the holidays.

One visit in New Berlin caused great excitement. While cleaning up after the departure of visitors, a widow discovered a man's hat in her parlor. Where was the man, she wondered? She searched high and low, but could not locate the owner. Afraid, she remained awake that evening, fearing the worst. The next day, she repeated the search, and had another sleepless night. By the third day, her neighbor noticed she was missing, called on her friend, and found her both exhausted and frantic. The fearful widow explained the source of her angst, producing the hat. "My Goodness!" the neighbor exclaimed, "That is my husband Henry's hat. Sally wore it out belsnickeling this week." This custom of visiting while in costume, continued in rural areas of Pennsylvania until the 1930s, and was called belsnickling. Spirited young participants were referred to as belsnicklers.

Some of these holiday traditions overlapped into other seasons. Therefore, when you open your door to trick-or-treaters on Halloween, you are also participating in a tradition dating back hundreds of years.

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Two Reels and a Crank¹

By

Nessie S. Watson

Editor's Introduction

This paper was written more than thirty years ago. Although ACCOUNTS publishes only new essays composed expressly for it, this paper well merits an exception. Itself arguably an historical document, it is likely the most authoritative source on Mifflinburg's movie theatre in existence. Its author, Nessie S. Watson, passed away in 2009 and the essay is used with permission of her son, Jace Watson.

In 1979 Mrs. Watson enrolled at Susquehanna University in the course "Introduction To Film," taught by Richard Kamber. Her project was based on interviews and a close study of newspapers and documents. Professor Kamber wrote the following note on the front page: "An excellent piece of first hand research. I'm making a copy of this paper for my files. You ought to submit this paper or a portion of it for publication in a local newspaper. A+".

This paper would not have appeared here but for Robert Lynch, who, after bringing the manuscript's existence to the editor's attention, worked closely with the family of Nessie Watson to secure permission to include it in this issue of ACCOUNTS.

¹ This article by Nessie W. Watson was submitted as a class assignment to Prof. Richard Kamber, in a course at Susquehanna University Ms. Watson took, Introduction to Film, in the fall of 1979. The paper is presented here with almost no changes (most exceptions are to correct a very few spelling and punctuation instances to re-number her footnotes, and to add identified editorial comments). The original paper included an appendix of photographs, newspaper movie notices, and correspondence that, because of contemporary copyright restrictions, cannot be included. Our thanks to Jeff Mensch for supplying the two photographs which appear here.

Two Reels and a Crank

By

Nessie S. Watson

Mifflinburg, Pa, has had movies for a period of sixty years with its beginning dating back close to 1894 when Thomas A. Edison displayed his peep-show Kinetoscope in New York City. A town of perhaps 1,000 people at the beginning of the twentieth century Mifflinburg would today merit recognition if research were done to find the town with the most progressive and longest-lived movie palace. Located in the heart of Buffalo Valley, Union County, Mifflinburg citizens enjoyed movies in 1904 -- the days of "two reels and a crank." Quite an achievement considering the fact that only two years earlier, in 1902, the first motion picture theatre opened in Los Angeles, California, known as the Electric Theatre.

The very first movies in Mifflinburg were shown by itinerants at Sankey Hall or perhaps at the high school. Located on Walnut Street near Fourth, Sankey Hall was a ramshackle structure which was available to touring shows and local talent. It was during this year, 1904, that a movie was presented at the Opera House in Lewisburg, located nine miles east of Mifflinburg. A group of interested people from Mifflinburg boarded the evening train and journeyed to Lewisburg to see the movie. They came home enthused, remarking that the pictures were "true and distinct," and the action smoother than in earlier films shown by the itinerants.²

Later that same year (1904) a Mr. Brosius of Williamsport opened the first theatre in Mifflinburg. The palace, as they were called in those days, was located on the northwest corner of Chestnut and Third Streets. The structure, comparatively plain, rectangular, and of brick was set almost flush with the

² Snyder, Charles M., Mifflinburg Telegraph, p. 2.

street. It was built by Joseph Boob, architect and builder of the 1840's and 1850's. What business originally occupied the building is not known.³

A screen was hung at the back and a projection booth erected at the front of the hall. The floor of the theatre was level, with benches for seats. Some elevated seats were along the side walls. Electricity for the lighting and operation of the equipment was furnished by a generator driven by a threshing machine engine located at the rear of the building. The theatre was known as the Nickelodeon and the admission was set at 5¢.⁴

It is interesting to note that Mr. Brosius opened the theatre in 1904, a year after the production of The Great Train Robbery. A film of nine minutes, or less, it was the first western, in a manner of speaking. Certainly it was the first film to establish the basic "horse opera" pattern of crime, pursuit, and capture. It was produced for the Edison Company by Edwin S. Porter who wrote, directed and photographed it. It is not known if the film was shown at the Mifflinburg theatre.⁵ Of other movies shown one resident recalls a comedy which was quite thrilling. Not remembering the title of the film it is described as follows:

"The scene was the interior of a trolley. The action depicted a rider reading the comics. Becoming excited, he thumped the thigh of the man next to him. The latter subsequently left the seat, and a straight-laced woman took his place. Continuing to enjoy the comics, the reader brought down his hand again, only to strike the leg of the woman. Jumping to her feet she denounced his behavior and stalked toward the exit."⁶

Another viewer recalls a movie entitled The Black Diamond Express. The excitement of the film left lasting impressions. In one scene a train came bearing down the tracks in such a manner as to cause spectators (almost in unison) to cover their eyes to avoid catastrophe. The Black Diamond Express was the story of a train engineer whose love for a beautiful young girl was discouraged by her social climbing mother. The cast of characters included Monte Blue (engineer),

³ Snyder, Charles M., Union County, Pennsylvania, p. 125.

⁴ Snyder, Mifflinburg Telegraph, p. 2.

⁵ Franklin, Joe, Classics of the Silent Screen, pp. 10-11.

⁶ Snyder, Mifflinburg Telegraph, p. 2.

Edna Murphy (young girl), and Myrtle Stedman (mother). The script was written by Harvey Gates from a story by Darryl Zanuck. Howard Bretherton was the director.⁷ This movie was not a classic but Bretherton used shooting and cutting devices that resemble those of Hitchcock.

Mr. Brosius continued to operate the Nickelodeon until 1908 and by now about 5,000 nickelodeons had appeared throughout the United States. This increased the demand for motion pictures. Originally movies were considered entertainment but with the development of new techniques and inventions it was fast becoming an industry. At the same time filming and the film industry was declared as an art form, with the credit going to the director David W. Griffith. He had mastered the techniques of film-making and made going to the cinema something more than an evening of entertainment. Films now served as a barometer to tell and record events in history, art, psychology and sociology. What was happening in the film industry affected Mr. Brosius and his management of the theatre in Mifflinburg and he decided to sell the business. Thus, the nickelodeon era came to a close in Mifflinburg.

The business was purchased by William “Fish” Romig and his wife “Kitty” and was moved to the former Reichard Store building midway between 4th and 5th Streets on the north side of Chestnut Street, where it remained until its doors were finally closed. Incidentally, Mr. Romig acquired the nickname “Fish” from Fisher which was his middle name. The Romigs remodeled the building, installing a stage to accommodate local musical groups and various activities of the high school. Motion picture entertainment was limited to Friday and Saturday nights. The floor was flat and the seats (benches) removable so that the auditorium could be transformed into a ballroom. The floor was great for dancing but viewing a movie required much squirming to find an open space between the heads in the next row.⁸

The projection room was equipped with one single machine which required rethreading and winding after each reel. This provided plenty of time for conversation and eating of roasted peanuts which was the universal

⁷ Hirschhorn, Clive, The Warner Brothers Story, p. 53.

⁸ Snyder, Mifflinburg Telegraph, p. 2.

refreshment during the early years of movies. Fortified with bags of roasted peanuts to eat during each intermission the children crowded into the front rows leaving their parents to sit farther back in the theatre with larger bags of peanuts. Bushels of shells accumulated on the floor at each performance which necessitated employing a janitor to clean after every show.⁹ Attendance was good at the newly acquired and remodeled theatre now named the “Lyric.” Attendance was exceptionally high on Saturday nights because a western was always shown.¹⁰

Because this was the era of silent movies Mr. Romig employed pianists who provided appropriate music as the projector was set in motion. If tough, sad eyes William Hart or tall, handsome Tom Mix galloped to the rescue a rollicking crescendo was rendered by the pianist. Anguish or sorrow radiating from the screen brought forth a series of somber chords. Mary Snyder Davies who now lives in El Paso, Texas, had this to say about her career as pianist at the Lyric:

“The regular player had quit and someone suggested I play to earn a little money. I was in the eighth grade so you can imagine the music was not at all professional. However, Mr. Romig was pleased and said to keep it up so I played for 75¢ a show. I played for the first show and maybe a little of the second showing. There was no score or even a light. I just played familiar popular songs with some improvisations thrown in depending on the action taking place on the screen. I don’t know how the patrons put up with it but I was there for about two years.”¹¹

In the booth Romig cranked the projector as evenly as possible, though fast action on the screen almost invariably accelerated his pace just as heartbreak slowed the crank. In 1922 he added a second machine and in 1925 an assistant projectionist (John Shively), permitting a continuous operation and two showings in an evening. Now his program was heavy drama on Thursday nights and a western on Friday and Saturday nights.¹²

In 1926 the Romigs sold the Lyric Theatre to Carlton Theatres, Inc. of Milton, Pa. The theatre became No. 12 of the Carlton chain and was operated by

⁹ Shively, John W.

¹⁰ Snyder, Union County, Pennsylvania, p. 136.

¹¹ Davies, Mary S.

¹² Shively, John W.

the late Carl E. Hecht and James O'Tool. The house was closed for some six weeks during alterations which consisted of installing a sloped floor and changes in the box office. Walls were covered with metal paneling, new seats were installed, and the Exit lighting system was updated. The projection room was stripped and replaced with all electric equipment and accessories, enabling each projector to be operated independently. An organ was installed and played for a time by the late Maude Ringler. At a later date a combination piano-organ replaced the organ. The house reopened in May of 1926 as the New Theatre. There was also a new admission price -- 10¢ for kids and 25¢ for adults. The seating capacity was 301 and it was usually filled to capacity. In 1927 the piano-organ was replaced by a canned music unit.

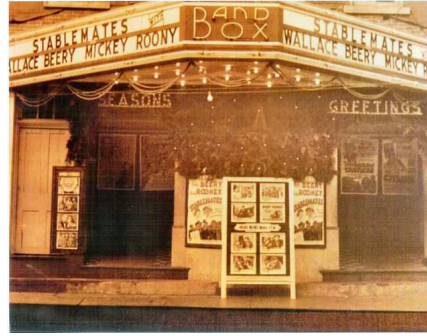
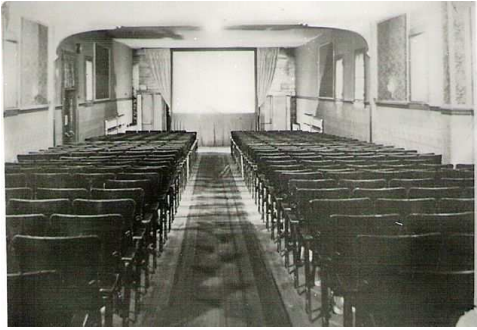
In July of 1929 the entire theatre chain was sold to two Williamsport men, Milton Forman and Howard Ulman who were now the operators. In September of the same year, with the advent of sound pictures, a sound on disc system was installed and placed in operation with Broadway Melody the first all-sound movie to be shown in Mifflinburg. This marked the demise of the silent era. It also marked the demise of the Carlton Theatres chain. With the invention of new sound equipment came the problem of added expense. Studios invested huge sums of money for the new machines to record the voice and new sound-proof stages for shooting film. The theatre owners also faced big expenses, being forced to buy new sound projectors, new speakers, and new wiring to link the two. To add to the problem the country was into a depression, attendance was declining and there was nothing to do but close the doors, and so Carlton Theatres, Inc. was dissolved in the fall of 1931. Hopefully, times would get better and the theatre would reopen.

In May of 1932 Charles M. Weikel, owner of a 5 and 10¢ store in Mifflinburg, purchased the business and equipment and leased the building from the owner Mr. Levi, who then lived in Baltimore. Once again a renovation program was in order. A general house-cleaning took place in the auditorium and a new convenience, rest rooms, were installed. The sound on disc system had run its course and a sound on film system replaced it. New arc lights and rectifiers furnished direct current to the projection equipment which eliminated

flickers on the screen insuring a steady light for the picture. An enclosed film rewind was built which met the requirements of the Dept. of Labor and Industry. The theatre boasted new lights inside and out. Under the new name The Fox Theatre Mr. Weikel had a grand reopening May 26, 1932. Mr. Shively now held the position of chief projectionist because he had kept abreast of the mechanics of projecting films and knew how to handle most of the problems as they came along. The next seven years were profitable and exciting for Mr. Weikel and his staff.

Warner Bros., RKO, MGM, Paramount, United Artists and other film companies set up distribution centers throughout the country. The Fox selected its weekly programs from advance press books. Representatives from the various companies came from Philadelphia and bartered with Mr. Weikel for films, which were purchased in blocks of ten to twenty five. David O. Selznick was one of the "big shot" producers during the 1930's and in order to get one of his films the buyer had to take some junk films along with it. Generally, the film company received 40% to 70% of the box office receipts. Gone with the Wind took 70% of the receipts and had to be shown a specific number of days. The three-part structure of the American film industry, producer, distributor and exhibitor was working well for all parties and Mr. Weikel had a profitable enterprise operating. But, alas, another change was about to take place at the Fox.

The firm of Clifford-Flynn and Co. purchased the building, business, and equipment in 1939 and this time the theatre was completely revamped. The lobby and aisles were carpeted and new seats installed. The walls and ceiling were covered with acoustic material and finished with cloth tapestry. New drapes and curtains were hung and new lighting plus a perforated screen allowed the speaker system to be placed behind the screen. The box office was remodeled to accommodate entrance to the projection room.



The Mifflinburg Band Box Theatre, interior and exterior.

Photos courtesy of Jeff Mensch. Photographer unknown.

The projection room was equipped with new projectors, lamps, and rectifiers along with a Western Electric Sound System. A marquee was installed along with poster display cases, and re-wiring was done throughout the theatre. Once again the name changed – this time to The Band Box. Mr. Shively was made resident manager and also assisted in the projection room when needed.

Promotional methods included serials which ran for twelve to fifteen weeks. Perils of Pauline was one of the more popular series. Wednesday nights became Ladies' Night and a glass dish was given free with the purchase of a ticket. Many ladies collected complete sets of dishes which are now collector's items. Newsreels and novelty shorts added to the reasons for spending an evening at the movies.

The firm of Clifford-Flynn continued to buy more theatres with businesses in Allentown, White Haven, Montrose, Pa., and Waterbury, Conn. Despite the fact box office receipts were slowly decreasing this chain operation continued until 1948 when it was disposed of, each theatre being sold separately.

The Band Box was sold to C. D. Weiser of Middleburg. He updated the projection and sound equipment to accommodate the wide screen pictures and he also changed the name of the theatre to The Pix. He showed good, up-to-date films at moderate prices but the attendance diminished despite his efforts. New technologies and inventions were the culprits this time.

In 1954 the theatre changed hands again. Mr. Robert Etzler of McClure was now the owner, and operated The Pix until 1956 when it permanently closed due to theatre patronage favoring television.

What was the Mifflinburg movie palace for almost sixty years now houses a Real Estate Agency. Sad. Nevertheless, nostalgia sets in as one recalls the movie theatre downtown and the fine films that were shown there: Ben Hur, Cleopatra, Gone with the Wind -- to name a few. Film makers of those days did some magnificent things -- some of them so magnificent that they have never been equaled. "Masterpiece," "genius," "great," and "superb," are superlatives befitting the directors, stars, and any others who had a hand in turning out films during the existence of the Mifflinburg movie palace. Her memory lingers on.¹³

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- Shively, John W.

13 Nessie Watson in her final footnote writes, "Pictures courtesy John W. Shively." Her paper included a supporting collection of reproduced photographs, newspaper articles, movie ads, and correspondence that cannot be included here because of contemporary permission requirements for published materials.

Unknown Fraktur from Central PA Artist: Are There More?

by
Joannah Skucek and Jim Bohn

A “new” Fraktur* by artist Johann Valentin Schuller has surfaced recently. Although this Fraktur was made in 1813 for Union County residents, it appeared in Ohio and now resides in Florida. This Fraktur has never been documented in any prior publications dealing with this specialty.

Fraktur art was prolific in central Pennsylvania during the 19th century. An American Fraktur is the carry-over of the tradition of illuminated manuscripts from Western European countries. There has been a surge in surfacing of Fraktur and their documentation in the past 50 years as attics



Example of a Geburts- und Taufschein (birth and baptismal document) announcing in German the 1828 birth of Johann Jacob Miller in Perry Township. Pre-printed form from J. Baab, Printer, Harrisburg.

From the collection of the Union County Historical Society

get cleaned out, junk boxes emptied and blanket chest emptied or old Bibles reviewed. It is a fertile field for investigation and research.

These hand painted and decorated documents were created mainly as birth announcements, baptism or (seldom) marriage certificates, Vorschrift (a school exercise demonstrating penmanship), house blessings or presentation pieces (generally a small reward of merit for a student, member of the church, favorite neighbor, notation of ownership of a Bible, etc.).

One of the best-known Fraktur artist in our area was Henry Young (1792-1858). This multi-tasking German immigrant is considered the most prolific Fraktur artist to be catalogued from central Pennsylvania. He was unusual as he worked in the German as well as the English language.



Example of a Geburts- and Taufschein (birth and baptismal document) declaring in English the 1816 birth and baptism of Anna Pollock in Derry Township, Northumberland County. Hand drawn and colored by Henry Young.

From private collection

Johann Valentin Schuller (1759-?) is thought to have spent most of his Fraktur career in the Mahantongo Valley region of Northumberland County. Schuller's penmanship is so neat it resembles the block print on his printed

certificates. He frequently signed his works, either by hand or in print. He is most well-known for tidy, half-size certificates in which the text is neatly flanked by urns and tulips. He used patterns for tulip and urn decoration and other floral decoration that he colored in lovely shades of red and yellow. Schuller may have made Fraktur to sell to others, for a handful of certificates listed as his were not filled in by him.



Gerburts- and Taufschein (birth and baptismal document) declaring in German the 1813 birth of Johann Peter K(H)ern in Center Township, Union County. (Penns Creek is in Center Township today. Union County was created in the same year, 1813. Snyder County was divided from Union County in 1855.) Made by Johann Schuller.

From private collection

The printed portion of this Fraktur was probably produced in Reading where he is documented to have bought many pre-printed forms. Part of the frame and the black writing was printed. Schuller would fill the personal information in the spaces allotted, and embellish the frame and sides of the document. Although the very earliest American Fraktur were completely hand lettered and painted, it was very common to have pre-printed forms as printing facilities became available.

As seen in the end bibliography, much research has been done since the 1950's in Fraktur art. Known Fraktur certificates and Fraktur artists have been

tediously researched and catalogued. But there are surely many more examples of this early Pennsylvania folk art waiting to be re-discovered.



Example of a Geburts- und Tauf-schein (birth and baptismal document) announcing in German the 1824 birth of Daniel Kraemer in Penn's Township (now Snyder County). Hand-applied color on pre-printed form from G. Miller, New Berlin.

From the collection of the Union County Historical Society

Pricing of this folk art has not traveled the rollercoaster of the economy as a whole. The prices have remained subject to condition of the piece, personal preference, availability or rareness of the piece and popularity of the artist. For example a Fraktur by Rev. Henry Young (Centre County, Pennsylvania 1792-1861) was estimated between \$2,000-\$4,000 at Garth's Auctioneers & Appraisers in their January 6-7, 2012 auction, and the final purchase price was \$7,500. In 1974 a pair of Fraktur sold for \$2,300 at an estate sale of Edgar and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch. Twenty years ago, a Henry Young Fraktur sold for \$5000.

One of the highest prices known to be paid was for a Centre County Fraktur by artist, Rev. Geistweite (1761-1831). This very rare, highly embellished “verse hymn” of ink on paper was estimated to bring \$15,000-\$30,000. The winning bidder paid \$330,000 in 2004. Certainly many of these Pennsylvania German creations are still waiting to resurface. Who will be the fortunate discoverer?

Notes

This article was compiled by Joannah Skucek according to information from Jim Bohn.

* The word Fraktur in German is the same in singular and plural---no “s” is added in the plural when using the German term. As a German noun it is customarily capitalized.

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A readily accessible introduction to the nature and history of Pennsylvania Fraktur can be found on the website of the Historical Society of Berks County: www.berkshistory.org/fraktur/

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Fraktur Birth Certificate.
1813 Printed by Johann Balentin Schuller, inscribed for Johann Peter Kern, born April 1, 1813, in Center Township, Union County, Pennsylvania. Printed text flanked by watercolor urns and tulips, 7 1/2" h. 13" w., in a painted frame, 10 3/4 "h. 16" w. \$250-\$500.

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1977 The Fraktur Artist Henry Young. Der Reggeboge. Quarterly of the Pennsylvania German Society Vol. 11, No. 3-4, Fall 1977.

Examples of Websites that deal in Fraktur sales:

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www.liveauctioneers.com

www.ebay.com

www.amazon.com



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More Union Countians who moved to Illinois, Wisconsin and Beyond

by

Carl R. Catherman

Timothy J. Ryan's article about Union Countians who emigrated to Stephenson County, Illinois, which appeared in ACCOUNTS Vol 2, No. 1, was the inspiration for this article. Lois DeGarmo, long time volunteer at the Stephenson County Genealogical Library once remarked to me that she believed that more than half of the current residents of the county were descended from people who came there from Union, Snyder and Centre Counties in Pennsylvania. Relatives on my mother's side of the family from both Union and Snyder and on my father's side from Union went to Stephenson County, to adjacent Green County, Wisconsin, and beyond.

America in the mid-19th century was a mostly agricultural society and most of the migrants from central Pennsylvania who went west were tenant farmers in search of cheap land. Since tenancies ran from April 1 to March 31 of the following year those who decided to migrate usually began their journeys early in April. This was not a good time to travel. The weather was often cold and spring rains played havoc with the primitive system of dirt roads and wagon tracks that were the norm at the time. Rivers and even small streams were flooded at times, causing delays under miserable conditions. In addition, folks from the central part of Pennsylvania faced the hurdle of having to get over the Allegheny Mountains.

Nevertheless it was necessary to make this early start in order to arrive in time to clear some land and build shelter before cold weather set in. Thus, not only was the journey long and arduous but it was followed by a period of intense labor in order to be prepared for winter.

The Bolender Party - 1840

We can get a good idea of what the trip was like from an article that appeared in The Orangeville Courier (Illinois) on July 6, 1901. At the Bolender family reunion Levi Bolender had given an account of the journey he made in 1840. Levi was 17 years old at the time and had come with his parents, John and Catherine (Steese) Bolender and their other eight children. John Bolender had been born in 1796 about a mile east of Middleburg but had lived as a tenant farmer in Hartley Township since 1832. Also in the group were John's younger brother, Michael's, family of seven, and three unmarried men, George Maurer and Michael and Isaac Gift. The group was led by John Kleckner who had traveled west from Buffalo Valley in 1838 to find suitable land and found what he was looking for in Stephenson County. The Kleckner family consisted of nine members.

According to Levi Bolender's account the group assembled on the north side of Middle Creek at Royer's Bridge, about 3 miles west of Middleburg on April 6, 1840. The trip to Lewistown took two days. The next day Reuben Bolender and Charles Kleckner took the farm implements and household goods on a boat while the rest of the party continued on by horse and wagon. The boat would be transported via the Pennsylvania Canal to Hollidaysburg where the goods would be unloaded and transferred to the Allegheny Portage Railroad and taken to Johnstown. There the goods would be transferred again to boat that would use the western portion of the canal for transport to Pittsburgh.



Route take by the Bolender party , 1840.

In the meantime the rest of the party continued overland with their horses and wagons. It rained the first two days after leaving Lewistown and the party

had difficulty finding lodging. Often the women and children stayed in a farmhouse while the men slept in the wagons.

When they arrived at Pittsburgh they were supposed to regroup with the two young men who were traveling by boat but the boat had not arrived. They spent two days purchasing stoves and various other articles, intending to ship the heavier items down the Ohio River to its confluence with the Mississippi, then up the latter to Galena in northwestern Illinois and finally overland to Stephenson County.

Not wanting to waste valuable time John Kleckner sent the rest of the party on its way while he waited for the boat. His intention was to load the purchased goods onto a boat and meet up again in Dayton, Ohio. Kleckner became anxious and started out on horseback to see what had happened to the boys. Somehow he missed them and went all the way back to Lewistown and then returned to Pittsburgh. There he learned that the boys had arrived and had continued on with their cargo down the Ohio. He then had no choice but to load the purchased goods and start down river.

Meanwhile the horses and wagons had crossed the Monongahela River and gone on to Wheeling where they crossed the Ohio River. Here they entered the National Road (now US Route 40) that was in much better condition but on which they had to pay toll. After leaving Zanesville, Ohio, they had a narrow escape when one wagon almost tipped over on a high hill. After leaving Columbus they had nothing but rain and mud until they reached Dayton.

Here they expected to reconnect with John Kleckner who was coming down the Ohio River to Cincinnati and then up the Miami Canal to Dayton, but Kleckner was not there so the party continued on. It must have been worrisome for Mrs. Kleckner. First her son had not met up with them in Pittsburgh and now her husband was also missing. However, Kleckner arrived in Dayton only a few hours after the horses and wagons had left. He made arrangements for the goods purchased in Pittsburgh to be shipped to Galena, mounted his horse and caught up with the others later the same day.

The next day they crossed into Indiana where they found the roads muddy and almost impassable in places. Finding lodging continued to be a problem and

most nights they had to ask local farmers to provide a place for the women and children to sleep. Finally, after reaching Indianapolis the weather turned warmer. Now the women and children slept in the wagons and the men slept wherever they could find a reasonably comfortable spot on the ground.

The party continued on to Terre Haute where they were joined by another family who had been traveling alone. They were ferried across the Wabash River but soon realized they had left the other family behind. Mike Bolender returned to help them but was unable to catch up with the rest. The area had been deluged with rain for a week and the roads were full of mud and water. The main party moved on but Mike had a hard time finding the track. Fortunately he met up with two men who were able to guide him to Paris, Illinois, where the others were waiting. Levi related that Mike “was as mad as a wet hen” because they had not waited for him.

Shortly after leaving Paris they stopped for a few days to rest and buy cattle. Turning to the northwest they soon encountered sloughs and marshes, making progress extremely difficult. Wagons sank so deep that it took two teams of horses to pull them out. Nevertheless, they finally reached Peoria where they were ferried over the Illinois River. They continued on to Knoxville and then turned northeast, crossing the Rock River near Dixon. Two more days going north took them to Freeport, the seat of Stephenson County. They arrived on June 6 while Charles Kleckner and Reuben Bolender who had taken the river route arrived one day later.

From Freeport the party moved on to Rock Grove Township in the extreme northeast part of the county. Both of the Bolender families moved into existing log cabins. Neither family was able to build and move into suitable accommodations until the following spring. John Bolender died in 1868, by which time he and his sons and his son-in-law George Maurer owned over 1000 acres of land just to the east of the village of Rock Grove. At this time John Kleckner’s sons owned ca. 320 acres bordering George Maurer’s land on the east plus ca. 600 acres farther east along the Wisconsin state line. Also by this time there were at least six families from central Pennsylvania living in Rock Grove village and four families living on farms nearby.

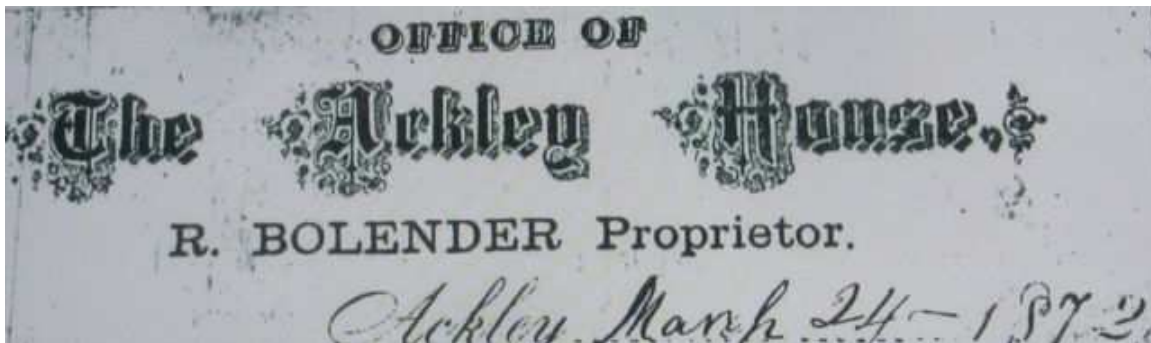
Mike Bolender purchased a claim in Oneco Township. By the end of the Civil War he and his sons owned ca. 375 acres to the north and east of Orangeville. At the same time Michael Gift, another member of the Kleckner party, owned ca. 300 acres adjoining the Bolender properties. At least six central Pennsylvania families were living in Orangeville and five on farms close to the Bolender properties. Mike Bolender's largest tract is bordered on the north by the Wisconsin state line and on the west by a road now known as Bolender Road.

Relatives Follow the Pathfinders

It was common practice for migrants who settled in the west to write home and invite other relatives to join them. Thus, later in the 1840s and 1850s the Bolender brothers were joined by several Gearhart and Wittenmeyer families from Snyder County to whom they were related by marriage. Finally, in 1865 their youngest living brother Frederick moved to Stephenson County. Frederick had moved from Snyder County to New Berlin in the 1830s. After the death of his first wife he married Sarah, a daughter of John Steese. After her father's death Frederick and Sarah moved to the Steese farm which was the site of the 1755 Leroy Massacre. Their youngest son John Henry is buried in the Steese family graveyard on the farm.

Due to the expansion of the road system and road improvements Frederick's journey west was not as difficult as that of his brothers' but he did experience one serious problem they had not. On June 1, 1865, The Mifflinburg Telegraph reported, "We are informed that F. Bolender, Esq., late Commissioner of Union County, while at Pittsburgh on his way west, was robbed of about \$90, by pick-pockets."

After the Civil War four of John Bolender's children moved on to find opportunities elsewhere. Reuben went to Ackley, Iowa, where he owned and operated The Ackley House, a large hotel. Matilda married Jackson Kleckner



Ackley House stationary

author's collection

and moved to Dallas County, Iowa, where they engaged in farming. John moved to Monroe, Wisconsin, where he and his children operated a highly successful business and were active in civic affairs. Isaac moved to Perry, Iowa, and worked as a carpenter.

Mike Bolender's children all remained in Stephenson County but he and John both had grandchildren who moved on to Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Colorado, California and the province of Alberta in Canada.

Early Bolender and Catherman Migrations

John and Mike Bolender were not the first members of the family to go west but unfortunately the earlier migrants did not leave extensive records of their journeys. Their uncle John had served in local militia units during the Revolutionary War. John later served for many years as a justice of the peace and shortly after Union County was erected he was appointed to the position of Associate Judge in 1815. (This might have been an example of political patronage since his father Adam was well acquainted with Gov. Simon Snyder.) After his father's death John migrated to Hamilton County, Ohio, in 1822. His son John had settled there a year earlier and two other sons joined them in 1823. They all settled in or near Elizabethtown, a little village almost on the Indiana border. In 1825 John (the son) wrote to the Harmony Society, a Christian pietistic group that practiced celibacy and had recently relocated to Beaver County, Pennsylvania, expressing interest in bringing his family to their settlement but nothing came of it. Other members of the extended family moved on to settle in

Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi and California.

John and Mike's uncle Adam had also served during the Revolutionary War. After the death of his first wife he moved to Centre County in 1804. Prior to 1820 four of his sons migrated to Ohio, one to the vicinity of Dayton and the other three to the Canton area where they were joined about fifteen years later by another brother. A daughter and her husband moved to Pickaway County, Ohio just south of Columbus, also prior to 1820. We can assume that the three sons who first moved to the Canton area went on horseback since they were all under 20 years of age and would have had little to take with them.

The first person on the paternal side of my family to head west was my ggg-grandfather Jacob Catherman's younger brother Conrad. Perhaps out of a sense of adventure Conrad, another former Revolutionary War soldier, left his home near Swengel in 1795. Records are incomplete but it is clear that he died somewhere in the Northwest Territory in 1799 shortly before his 34th birthday and that estate papers were filed in Cincinnati. This was before Ohio was admitted to the Union. Whether his wife and two children were with him is unclear but if so they returned to Pennsylvania.

Conrad's daughter Catherine married Ezra Hayes and they joined a group of Mormons who settled in Nauvoo, Illinois. Ezra died at Nauvoo and Catherine and her daughters followed the Brigham Young party to Utah in 1848. Daughter Lucinda was married to Janvrin Hayes Dame (his second marriage) that same year and in 1851 daughter Lovina became Dame's third wife.

My great-grandfather Daniel's aunt Catherine (1797-1850) and her husband Benjamin Keister (1799-1872) and their eight children left Union County in 1844 and went to Stephenson County, Illinois, settling in Kent Township. Their oldest son David later moved to Oregon and two daughters went with their husbands to Iowa and Minnesota, respectively.

Catherman Siblings Go West

Four of Daniel's siblings went to the same region. Samuel Cotherman (the seventeen children in the family were taught by different teachers, producing

three different spellings of the surname) went to Rock Grove Township in Stephenson County in 1848. At the time he was 22 years old and unmarried. He stayed only a year before moving to Monroe in Green County, Wisconsin. He operated a nursery for a few years, then worked as a joiner until buying a large farm in Sylvester Township in 1856. He retired in 1895 and moved to town. In 1901 he sold all of his real estate and he and his wife moved to Faribault County, Minnesota where all six of their children were living. He died there in 1909. Many of his descendants still live there but his youngest son Edgar moved to the Adirondack Mountains in New York where he operated a vacation resort.

The next to go was Thomas, at age 21 and unmarried in 1855. He went directly to Monroe where brother Samuel was already living. Initially he worked as a carpenter and is credited with having helped to build many of the better houses in Monroe and vicinity. (Pennsylvania Germans often pretended that they did not understand English when they had some motive, usually ulterior. Tax records for Monroe in the 1850s are replete with entries of "Dutchman." Apparently Thomas was one of these because he does not appear by name until 1860.) In 1863 he purchased a farm of 80 acres in Section 1 of Monroe Township, living there until his death. The farm remained in the family until his grandson John's widow sold it in 1970. The location is on the east side of Wisconsin Route 69 ca. five miles north of Wisconsin Route 11.

"Uncle Tom" was my grandfather's favorite uncle because he would come back to Union County fairly frequently and regale the relatives with tales of what he had seen on his travels all over the country. In fact it was on just such a visit in 1903 that he died here and was buried in Hartleton Cemetery. I often wondered how someone with the responsibility of operating a farm could have traveled so widely until I met his great-grandson John in Monroe in 1995. John told me that Tom was able to travel by rail for free because his oldest son Frank worked for the railroad in Newark, New Jersey. Whenever he felt like it Tom got on a train and left his wife and unmarried daughter Susan to operate the farm until he returned. With a daughter married to a rancher in Kalispell, Montana, and the son in New Jersey Tom had an excuse to travel almost the entire length of the continent and he did just that.

When Thomas Cotherman migrated to Monroe he was accompanied by his brother Reuben, age 20. When Reuben left Union County he had already spent a substantial part of his life as a miller's apprentice with his brother-in-law Samuel Weidensaul. He worked as a miller from the time he arrived in Monroe until retiring in 1907.

Reuben had saved enough money that he was able to buy a building lot within a month of his arrival. In fewer than five years he had purchased another property, sold both and bought a small farm in Jefferson Township near the Illinois border.

In 1866 Reuben, in partnership with Aaron Stahl, purchased a property of 62 acres that included a saw and gristmill in Rock Run Township in Stephenson County. In 1871 he moved on to the mill property and bought out his partner's interest two years later. In 1877 he built a new mill and a new dam. His millpond became an important source of ice in the winter and the ice harvest brought in additional revenue. At the same time he began landscaping around the mill and pond. Eventually he opened up the property for picnics. It quickly became a popular recreation spot and another source of income from ticket sales, boat rentals and the sale of ice cream. He was almost fanatically meticulous about the appearance of his property and he once ejected a young couple for breaking twigs from a weeping willow tree and throwing them into the pond, after which he took a boat and retrieved the debris.

The families of all four of the siblings who had gone to Green County got together for a reunion at Reuben's picnic grove in 1903. In the photograph that was taken on this occasion (see below) Reuben, Thomas and their sister Sarah are the first three standing on the right. Samuel and his wife Elizabeth stand immediately to the left of the large bunch of bananas behind Sarah. In 1907 Reuben bought several lots in the village of Dakota and had a house built. Later that year he sold the mill property. He died in 1915.



Cotherman family reunion, Stephenson County IL. 1903.

Author's photo

Although Reuben and Thomas were quite different in personality for brothers separated in age by only two years they were obviously close. When Reuben's first wife died two days after the birth of their fourth child Thomas and his wife took the newborn daughter into their home and raised her as their own. Both of the brothers referred to her as "my daughter" in their wills.

One of the enduring questions pondered by Stephenson Country historians is what became of the millstones used in Reuben's mill. The millstones are of significance because they were the same stones that Dr. Thomas Van Valzah [see Timothy Ryan's article, ACCOUNTS, Vol. 1, No. 2] had brought from Union County in 1837. They were sold to Michael Shane about ten years later and used in his mill, the same mill later owned by Reuben Cotherman. When Reuben sold the land the next owner neglected the mill and the millpond. Supposedly he dropped the millstones into a large spring on the property but they have never been found.

In the 1960s the property was purchased by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia and eventually developed as a subdivision known as Lost Lake-Vladimirovo. All of the residents are members of the church. When I visited the

property in 1995 I spoke to one of them who told me that he had conducted an exhaustive but unsuccessful search for the millstones.

Sarah, younger sister of Samuel, Thomas and Reuben, was married to Samuel Emerick in Centre County in April 1856. Samuel, then 26 years old, had already established himself as a mason in Monroe and owned a house and lot there. Samuel and Sarah had their only three children before he enlisted in Co. B, 31st Regiment, Wisconsin Volunteers in 1862. He served three years and was engaged in Sherman's march through Georgia and the Carolinas.

After the war Samuel continued to work as a mason and dabbled in real estate. He was quite successful and in 1868 he built a larger house that still stands today. He died in the summer of 1879, a few months before his 49th birthday. In 1881 Sarah and her children sold the vacant lot next to their home and finally sold their house and lot in 1893. Apparently the house had been rented because by that time Sarah had been living for several years with her younger daughter and son-in-law, Elizabeth and Frank Hanna, on a farm of 233 acres in Plymouth County, Iowa. Her other two children had moved to Omaha, Nebraska. Sarah continued to live with the Hannas until her death.

Frank Hanna and his brother James had purchased the farm in Plymouth County in 1882. The deflationary period that began in the late 1880s and led to the serious economic depression in the 1890s hit them hard. They were unable to pay their taxes and to ward off foreclosure they sold the farm in 1892 and used the remaining proceeds to buy cheaper land in Charles Mix County, South Dakota. In 1909 Frank Hanna sold his land in South Dakota and purchased a much smaller farm in Benton County, Arkansas. He retired in 1920 and Sarah and the Hannas moved into the town of Rogers where she died four years later.

Staying in Touch with the Home Folks

Although five of the children in this family left Pennsylvania (brother William moved to Bellevue, Ohio in 1855) they kept in touch with the siblings they left behind by way of letters and with the exception of Sarah, occasional visits. In 1894 they began to plan a reunion that took place on September 7, 1895 at Albright's Grove (later Mohn's Grove), a picnic area south of Laurelton. All

seventeen of the children were still living and all but William and Sarah attended. It was a large gathering of over three hundred people. A photograph was taken of the fifteen who were there.



Fifteen of seventeen siblings. 1895.

Author's photo

The Bolenders on my mother's side of the family and the Cathermans on my father's side were typical of the pioneers who left central Pennsylvania for greener pastures in the west. After enduring the hardships of the trip and getting settled in a new land they built for themselves comfortable lives, albeit lives that were filled with hard work. Some of them were more successful financially than others but no doubt all of them did better than they would have if they had remained in the east. They were all part of the westward expansion that made the United States of America into a great and powerful nation.

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Numerous personal interviews with descendants of the Bolenders and Cathermans who went west.

✧ **ACCOUNTS** ✧

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Union County Historical Society

**Jacob Stauffer Whitman,
First Union County School Superintendent**

**by
Sidney G. Dreese**

Twenty years passed by from the birth of Union County until the Pennsylvania legislature enacted a law for public schools. Governor George Wolf persistently brought the bill to the floor from 1829 to 1833, when the “legislature [finally] responded, and fashioned a free, tax-supported, state-wide system of public education.” However, it could be accepted or rejected by local option. Governor Wolf signed the bill on April 1, 1834. Slowly the “aristocratic school law” was accepted in Union County, but it met opposition for several years due to taxation resistance and from those who feared losing their native German tongue. Schools had existed within the current geographic boundaries of Union County since the late 1700s, and under the public school law more public school buildings were constructed during the 1840s.

Two more decades went by after the school law was enacted before Union County deemed it prudent for the schools to have central supervision. “[B]eginning in 1854, [s]uperintendents were made responsible for the general supervision of the public schools. The position required leadership, tact and patience, dogged perseverance and unusual durability” (Snyder, 206). The man chosen for the position was Jacob Stauffer Whitman. At that time the territory comprising both Union and Snyder counties was a single county, Union, and Whitman “was charged with the supervision of 150 school districts” (Dunkelberger, 741).

Jacob Whitman was born to Jacob and Esther (Stauffer) Whitman, September 12, 1827, and spent his childhood on the family homestead near Boyertown, PA. “In his youth, he had a natural taste for the sciences,” and although his early education was meager, he valued the books he acquired. However, his uncle, the Hon. John Stauffer, an Associate Judge of Berks County, took a strong interest in Jacob’s education. His uncle facilitated his admittance into a private school in Boyertown. As Jacob’s progress impressed his uncle, Judge Stauffer made arrangements for his nephew to enroll at Marshall College, forerunner of Franklin & Marshall College. He entered the college in

1845, but did not graduate with his class, the Class of 1849. Due to ill health, he left the college in 1848; however, his credentials must have been impressive as he soon secured a position of leadership taking charge of the Mount Pleasant Seminary, Boyertown, PA (Biographical Dictionary, 631).



Jacob Stauffer Whitman
Image courtesy of the Pennsylvania State
University Archives

In 1851, he became the principal of the Berrysburg Academy in Dauphin County. From there he became the principal of the Freeburg Academy and served from October, 1853 until October, 1855. The academy opened on October 10, 1853. The town of Freeburg was located within Union County until the southern portion, including Freeburg, became Snyder County by an act of the Pennsylvania legislature on March 2, 1855 (Dunkelberger, 68, 738).

“The provision establishing county supervision of schools was the great feature of the law of 1854” (Wickersham, 508). As a result, Jacob Whitman was elected county superintendent for the schools of Union County, and served for one year, 1854-1855, but kept his position at the Academy. He had to deal with many challenges as superintendent. Some teachers failed to attend the teacher examinations he conducted.

Examinations were open to the public, and “were often unjustly criticized.” Parents in attendance at the examinations showed their indifference. Superintendent “visitations were unwelcome, their advice was unheeded, and even their presence was considered an offence.” Teachers complained about short periods of employment, low wages, and irregular attendance of students. In addition, there was a shortage of proper books, and schools were inadequately equipped (Wickersham, 513; Snyder, 206). Whitman resigned as superintendent on July 1, 1855, because he wanted to devote all of his time to the Freeburg Academy (Dunkelberger, 723).

Whitman’s plan to direct Freeburg Academy, however, was abruptly ended by an offer from Union Seminary in New Berlin. The Union Seminary Trustees’ Minutes, September 22, 1855, state that, “Mr. J. S. Whitman was appointed as a teacher of the Seminary at a salary of \$500 a year; if the committee thought it advisable.” He had suggested the amount of his salary. Whitman, a member of the first faculty, was a professor of Natural Science at Union Seminary for four years.



Image courtesy of Albright College Archives

The first catalog of the seminary, 1856, states, “The Seminary is furnished with an excellent set of Chemical and Philosophical Apparatus, Maps, Globes. &c., so as to render the instruction more practical. Field rambles, for which this section of country is particularly favorable, are made in the study of Botany, while the classes in Surveying have frequent practical outdoor exercises.” One can easily imagine Whitman taking

students on rambles around New Berlin down to Penns Creek, up to the mountain, and into nearby fields.

It was Whitman who began a museum at the seminary. The first specific reference to a museum comes from the 1860-1861 catalog: “A Museum is connected with the Institution, to which constant additions are making, thus [affording] students an opportunity of gaining much useful and interesting information.” He probably went on many rambles by himself to collect specimens for the museum, and for students to study.



The Science Room and the Museum at Union Seminary
Image courtesy of Albright College Archives

In 1859 he left Union County for the Farmer’s High School, forerunner of the Pennsylvania State University. Like the Union Seminary, he was part of the original faculty. He primarily taught botany, and also taught horticulture, geology, physiology, zoology, and veterinary science. Also, reminiscent of the Seminary, he was “fond of taking students on botanical expeditions in the neighboring mountains and valleys” (Dunaway, 24, 274).

He was the only professor to live on campus, and his cottage was located at the rear of the college, where he had planted a beautiful garden. The Penn State Alumni Quarterly, October 1916, notes that no one had good water except for Whitman so the

students went to his well. Students did not call him professor, but rather, “Jakey.” Henry Harvey, one of Whitman’s students, penned these words in 1865.

Next comes to my mind, Professor Whitman, whose long & graceful locks hung in rich profusion from the sides of his head, the absence of which from the place where the wool ought to grow, he vainly struggled to conceal by dragging a lock from the proximity of each ear. He was a good-natured Dutchman from New Berlin in Union Co., with his wisdom every new student was impressed, not to say startled, on his first introduction to botany, by being told that thenceforth the familiar must be known only as “*Leontodontaraxicumdeusleouis*” ... a bit of information the learned professor imparted with an extra twist of the queue on the top of his head, which we innocent boys imagined was for the purpose of tightening the band around the top of his head to keep the vast store of knowledge it contained from escaping.

Immediately upon the death of President Evan Pugh, April 29, 1864, Whitman served as acting president, and then vice-president of the institution, which had by then been re-named the Agricultural College of Pennsylvania. (That name was used until 1874 when it became Pennsylvania State College. “University” did not appear in the name until 1953.) He continued as vice-president along with his teaching responsibilities until he resigned in 1866. Leaving Pennsylvania, he moved to Kansas, where he lived for the rest of his life. “Wanting to see and know something more of the great West, he resigned this lucrative position to accept the professorship of natural science at Baker University.” At Baker he taught botany, physiology, and geology from 1867 to 1870. He also had the distinction of planning and making a beautiful botanical garden at the university. He was also then the principal of the schools of Lyndon, Kansas (Biographical Dictionary, 631).

At the State Agricultural College, Manhattan, Kansas, which later became Kansas State University, 1873-1876, he was the Chair of elementary and agricultural chemistry, entomology, botany, and natural philosophy. During the summer of 1874, the Board of Trustees gave Whitman permission to collect geological, entomological and botanical specimens. During the years, 1879-1880, he was the superintendent of schools for Osage County, Kansas. For the last two decades of his life, he operated a drug store,

Whitman Drug Store, in Lyndon, Kansas. He died on August 12, 1894 and is buried in the Lyndon Cemetery.

Much of Jacob Whitman's life was devoted to learning and teaching. Through most of his 66 years he was involved with public schools or higher education as a teacher and an administrator. His quest for knowledge never waned, and he wanted his students to explore and understand nature. He received honorary degrees, A.M. and M.D., from the University of Pennsylvania, and the Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia, which became known as Thomas Jefferson University. This learned man knew the outdoors was an excellent classroom. He was driven by a curiosity about the natural world, a curiosity that grew from his boyhood and continued throughout his adult life.

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Theron Shoemaker Dersham, (1913-2004)

by

Lois Huffines

While researching the text for *Mifflinburg and the West End* (Arcadia Publishing, 2012), I met John Dersham, who generously offered digital copies of Grover Bierly's photographs from the original glass negatives for use in the book. As John, who currently lives in Alabama, explained his connection to Mifflinburg, he mentioned an uncle, Theron Dersham, who had taught in the Mifflinburg school district for over 40 years and died in 2004. I became intrigued with Theron's Dersham's story—a life dedicated to education and strongly tied to Mifflinburg. I interviewed both Robert Lynch, who had been Theron's close friend, and Terry Dersham, Theron's son. Several of Theron's former students also passed on remembrances of him. Terry invited me to visit his childhood home in Mifflinburg and showed me various items that had belonged to his parents and grandmother. Since John is a photographer, the family history was also visually well documented. The Dersham family story itself mirrors the history of Mifflinburg, a small town settled and developed by strong and talented people.

There are teachers, and there are *teachers*. Theron S. Dersham is certainly of the second variety. With a teaching career that lasted from 1935 to 1978, multiple generations of students passing through the Mifflinburg school system sat in his classroom. This account serves as a tribute to his life-long commitment to education. Many residents of Mifflinburg still remember him as a good teacher and a great human being, who lived with a heightened sense of integrity and generosity. What did he do? What influenced his life? And what values guided him in his long career?

Theron's Parents

The Dersham family has had a presence in the Mifflinburg area since 1754, when Jacob, son of German immigrant Johann Jacob Dersham (born in 1733), settled in Mifflinburg. Theron's father, John Alexander Dersham, born in 1883, worked as an accountant for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Theron's parents married in 1909, and Theron was born on February 8, 1913, while his parents lived on North Eighth Street in Mifflinburg. Later the family moved to a farm on Furnace Road and lived there until his father died in 1920 during the great pneumonia outbreak of that year. Theron was only 7 years old. Theron's mother, Lena Jane (Shoemaker) Dersham, born in 1885, was left with the formidable task of raising three young children alone, Theron, Sara Ellen, born in 1915, and Watson Winaford in 1918. Lena left the farm and moved her family back into town to 300 Green Street.



House at 300 Green Street. (Photo courtesy of Lois Huffines)

Lena was a no-nonsense person. She graduated from Bloomsburg Teachers College in 1906, and taught at Creek School on Forest Hill Road and later at Pike School until 1922. She then taught third grade at the Mifflinburg elementary school until retiring in 1951. Her no-nonsense approach angered some parents of her students, it was said, when she told students in her class that

there was no Santa Claus. She taught all three of her own children in class. She expected her children to be well behaved, make good grades, and to be outstanding at everything they did. Living on a teacher's salary of about \$900 a year, she not only raised her three children, but instilled in them the work ethic and focus needed for successful achievement.



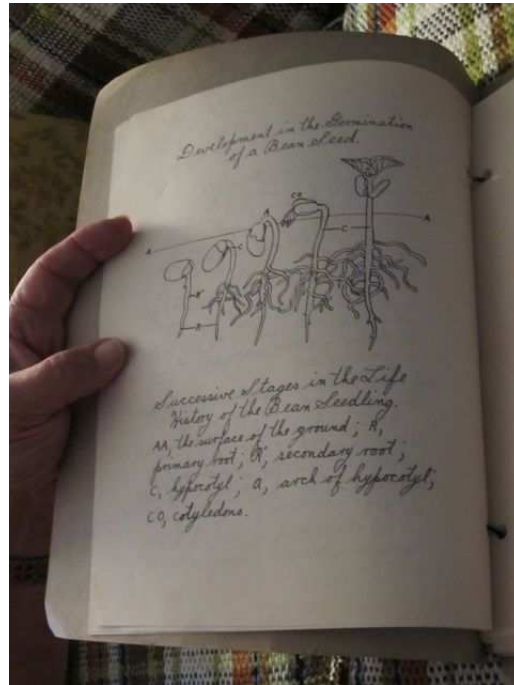
Lena Shoemaker presented class souvenir cards to her students.
(Photo courtesy of Lois Huffines)

During these early years, Theron's mother enjoyed the support of her family while her children were growing up, especially from her sisters Cora (Shoemaker) Watson and Maude (Shoemaker) Kleckner. They often provided her with produce and chickens from their farms. As the family later endured the Great Depression followed by the uncertainty of World War II, Theron learned the importance of demanding the best from himself and the self-assurance that comes from a supportive family life.

The High School and College Years

Theron's high school set the stage for his very active adult life. He excelled in school. Before entering his sophomore year in 1929, he had a botany assignment to prepare during the summer months. It involved the description and collection of summer flowering plants. His notebook still exists, and one notes his careful handwriting and clear botanical drawings. Amazingly, Lena had had a similar assignment, and her notebook also still exists. Although without

the drawings and skill displayed by Theron, Lena's notebook has the same careful presentation of the flowers and plants.



Theron's pre-sophomore high school year summer assignment notebook.
(Photo courtesy of Lois Huffines)

Theron graduated from high school in 1931, and the graduation program listed him as having received several awards: the Alumni Physics Prize, the Mathematics Prize, and a prize for perfect attendance. As valedictorian of the class, and he delivered a speech entitled "The U.S. and Her World Affairs." He was also president of his graduating class of 47 members.

Then it was on to Bucknell University. Theron attended Bucknell from the fall of 1931 to the spring of 1935 as a full time student. During that time he lived at home and commuted via a Model A Ford. As Lena's older son, he must have been a big help to her as the man of the house. While at Bucknell, Theron did not leave his high school alma mater in the lurch. Mifflinburg High School needed an additional person to play football in order to field a team. Theron suited up and helped them out on the playing field, even though he had already graduated. Having worked hard and steadily at Bucknell, Theron was inducted into Kappa Phi Kappa, an honorary fraternity for men in the field of professional education.

Kappa Phi Kappa promoted “the cause of education by encouraging men of sound character and recognized ability to study the problems and principles of the profession” (L’Agenda, 1945). In Theron’s time, Dr. Frank G. Davis was the faculty advisor. Theron served for one year as Vice President.

While attending Bucknell, Theron would have experienced the upheaval caused by the fire that destroyed Old Main, and ruined the East and West College wings of the building on August 27, 1932. Work began immediately to rebuild the structure, but classes needed to be housed elsewhere and other accommodations made. In 1935, Theron Dersham was awarded the Bachelor of Science in Education degree, and graduated from Bucknell along with 167 members of the Class of 1935.



Theron Dersham, 1935 Senior Yearbook Picture.
(Photo courtesy of John Dersham)

Teaching Career at Mifflinburg High School

Theron began his long teaching career at Mifflinburg High School in the fall of 1935. From the start he helped wherever he was needed and coached girls’ basketball from 1935 until 1940. He taught mainly mathematics, but his teaching assignments also included physics, shop, and history. On July 14, 1937, he married Dorothy Ruth Reynolds, and by 1939 he had earned the Master of Science in Education degree from Bucknell University.

All three of Lena’s children graduated from college with master’s degrees, and all three had been outstanding athletes in high school. All three became

teachers. Theron attended Bucknell and spent his career teaching mathematics at Mifflinburg High School. Sara Ellen attended Bloomsburg Teachers College and taught typing and business at Watsontown, which later merged with Warrior Run High School. Watson taught health at the high school in Knox, Pennsylvania; he later served in World War II, and when he returned from overseas, went back to college for his Masters of Health Education on the G.I. Bill. Watson later went on to be the Director of Health Education for the city of Cincinnati and later the Vice President of the American Heart Association.



From left to right, Sara Ellen Dersham, Watson Winaford Dersham, Lena Shoemaker Dersham, Theron Shoemaker Dersham
(Photo courtesy of John Dersham)

Theron's career at Mifflinburg High School lasted 42 years. He taught mathematics to three generations of some Mifflinburg families, also teaching his younger brother Watson and his own children in the classroom. His work with students did not happen only in the classroom. Younger students first met Theron as the school bus driver, which at least on one morning necessitated stopping a fistfight between Bob Lynch and a pugnacious co-student at the bus stop near Forest Hill. Former students describe him as a "good teacher," who was both strict and gentle. The Mifflinburg High School 1945 Yearbook, *The Nautilus*, describes him as follows. "Mr. Dersham is the glamour boy of the faculty. He is an excellent teacher and always has an answer to your mathematics

problem. His interest in sports, cheery smile, and willingness to help is an essential factor at M.H.S.” One former student noted gratefully that he always attended class reunions. Theron maintained high expectations of his students, both scholastically and behaviorally. His approach was mild but compelling. Bob Lynch describes Theron as someone who taught by example and then expected people to do the right thing.

Family Life

Theron and Dorothy lived at 302 Green Street, next to his mother Lena in a house made into a double. They had two sons, Earle Reynolds Dersham, born August 30, 1941, and Theron (“Terry”) John Dersham, born December 24, 1943. Terry describes his father as “always being there, always teaching him.” As a family they ate evening meals at home together; on weekends there were shared adventures: hunting, fishing, and camping at R. B. Winter State Park. There were summer vacation trips to Ocean City, Maryland, where Theron visited a Bucknell friend. On one fishing trip with their father, young Terry and Earle raced each other to the next fishing hole, quite unaware of running close by a rattlesnake. Theron brought them back, showed them the snake, and lectured them about being more aware of their surroundings. After school, Theron played ball with his sons, each sport in its season. He pitched to them when teaching them to bat,



Theron, Dorothy “Dot,” Earle, and Terry in front, 1952.
(Photo courtesy of John Dersham)

and when Terry wanted to be a pitcher, his dad took on the role of catcher. Theron built a backboard and basket for them at home, and soon all the kids in the neighborhood dropped by to play basketball. He taught them passing and catching a football. When Terry reached age 12, Theron took him deer hunting, having Terry stay at one location while Theron walked the mountain to drive the deer in his direction. Once his sons started hunting, Theron himself seldom got a deer; he spent his time making sure the boys got theirs.

Just as Lena had done before him, Theron expected his sons to be the best that they could be. Earle graduated from Mifflinburg High School as valedictorian of his class and had the singular honor of having had the high school yearbook dedicated to him that year because he was outstanding as a student and as a person. Earle went on to Princeton on a full scholarship, the first student from Mifflinburg High School to attend an Ivy League school. He graduated from Princeton *cum laude* as an aeronautical engineer and later worked as an engineer and distribution analyst for Exxon Mobil. After five years in Alaska, where he survived the Alaskan earthquake of 1964, Terry studied at Indiana Institute of Technology, where he graduated *summa cum laude* and received the Outstanding Electrical Engineering Award at graduation. He worked as a research engineer in microwave technology as a civilian for the Air Force. Having settled in Ohio, Terry served on the City Council of Vandalia, Ohio, and also as its Vice Mayor.

Starting in 1951, Theron worked as a lifeguard at R.B. Winter and was part of the summer work crew. At first he drove to and from R.B. Winter everyday, but by 1952 the family camped there through the summer, returning to Mifflinburg only for Terry's Little League baseball games and to do the wash and re-supply themselves with groceries. Later Theron and Dorothy ran a concession stand at R.B. Winter, which was a popular gathering place for local families, especially on weekends, before public and private swimming pools became more numerous.

The Dershams attended the First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mifflinburg. Theron taught the senior boys Sunday School class and served for a time as Superintendent of the Sunday School. He served on the church council

every other year from 1941 to 1973 (one was not permitted to have succeeding terms). He sang in the church choir for 70 years. According to Terry, everybody knew him, he had no enemies, and people looked up to him. Theron treated everyone with respect. He was a member of the Free and Accepted Masons Lodge 370 and of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of Free Masons of the Valley of Williamsport. He coached Little League baseball, but in order to avoid the appearance of favoritism, he did not coach the team on which his son Terry played.

The Later Years

In his later years, Theron was an avid golfer and bowler. Terry still displays the many trophies his father won in both sports. As a couple, Theron and Dorothy played pinochle every Friday evening with another couple and followed the card game with a bowl of ice cream. After Dorothy died, Theron continued to play with “the guys”, who included Bob Lynch, Bill Ruhl, and Earl Thomas. The far-reaching conversations during the card games often involved the controversies of the time. In particular, the on-going discussions of which high school the students living in Buffalo Township would attend, Mifflinburg or Lewisburg, was high on the list of topics. At first, from 1949 to the early 1970s, the parents of these students could decide for themselves. Later Mifflinburg, needing the added revenues, sued to have the students come to Mifflinburg. Judge Charles Kalp ruled in favor of continuing the practice of the families deciding. Mifflinburg appealed, and the state ruled that the students of Buffalo Township would attend Mifflinburg.

Dorothy died on March 11, 1970. Theron found it difficult to continue living in the home that they had shared. Lena had died in 1968, and the house at 300-302 Green Street had lost its warmth for him. At that point Theron chose to build a house on the corner of the property at Third and Green Streets. He contracted to have the house framed and under roof and exterior brick work done, but Theron built the interior of the house himself. He had already made cabinets and pieces of furniture and was a skilled carpenter. It is said that the new house was extraordinary in its efficient use of space. Theron lived in that

house with his sister Sarah Ellen until just before his death. Theron died on August 12, 2004 in Riverwoods, where he had resided for 17 days. He was 91 years old.



Watson, Sara Ellen, and Theron in 1997.
(Photo courtesy of John Dersham)

Terry recalls the many trips his father took to Ohio to help him remodel his house. In his 80s, Theron climbed the roof to fix leaks, helped finish the basement, and even re-did work he considered not solid enough. At one point he rebuilt certain corners in the house while Terry was off at work. On seeing what his father had done, Terry reminded him he was never going to put elephants in the basement. At age 90, Theron installed new doors and shelving for storage. He remained active until the final year of his life.

How does one take the measure of a man? By the closeness of his family, the success of his sons, the number of his friends, the accomplishments in his work life, his prowess as an athlete, his skill as a carpenter, the quality of his past times? Yes, of course, all of these together. But more important is the integrity of his character, his willingness to help others, his compassion toward all people, and his service to church and community. When asked what Theron Dersham was like, his student/colleague/friend Bob Lynch responded, "If there were more Theron Dershams, there would be no need for rules and regulations. People

would do what was right.” Strict and gentle, his was a life well lived and well loved. Even those who never met him must admire him for that.



Theron Shoemaker Dersham, the last church portrait,
taken when he was near 90 years old.
(Photo courtesy of John Dersham)

My thanks to John Dersham, Terry Dersham, Robert Lynch, and Jeanne Grove Zimmerman for their photographs and reflections on Theron S. Dersham. LH

✧ **ACCOUNTS** ✧

Published by the Union County Historical Society, Lewisburg PA

This Issue's Authors:

- After retiring from dentistry in Mifflinburg, **Jim Bohn** continued to pursue and collect his love of the PA German arts including painted furniture, butterprints, fraktur, redware, crocks, etc.
- A native of Vicksburg, **Carl R. Catherman** is a graduate of Susquehanna University and Tulane University, now a retired mathematics teacher.
- College Archivist and Special Collections Librarian at Albright College, **Sidney Dreese**, has a lifelong interest in the history of Union County.
- Moving to Lewisburg in 1964, **Nada Gray** subsequently served on Borough Council and as Borough Manager. She now co-chairs Union County's 2013 Bicentennial preparations.
- Having retired from Bucknell University, **M. Lois Huffines** recently completed four years as president of the Union County Historical Society.
- After residing in Germany for 20 years, **Joannah Purnell Skucek** returned to her home town of Mifflinburg with her family and has carried on her Mother's (Marie Purnell) tradition of preserving and promoting organizational activities.
- A 1935 graduate of Mifflinburg High School, **Nessie Shively Watson** was a lifelong resident of the Mifflinburg area who always loved local history.

The Purpose and Scope of ACCOUNTS

ACCOUNTS is not your usual journal of local history. It isn't the preserve of trained historians and scholarly writers. Not that their contributions aren't welcome, but ACCOUNTS is a community resource, available to anyone who knows something about the history of Union County and wants to share.

Guidelines

- ACCOUNTS is not a journal of formal scholarship. No bibliography or footnotes are required.
- Items will be short: generally 500 – 2500 words (a double-spaced page has about 250 words; so 2 to 10 pages in length).
- A variety of items are being sought, such as:
 - Accounts of events in Union County's history
 - Accounts from family history
 - Accounts of the lives of persons associated with the County
 - Accounts of businesses, churches, communities and places

- Descriptions of objects and their makers (furniture, buggies, etc.)
- Accounts of buildings (homes, barns, churches, commercial buildings, bridges, etc.), monuments, public works

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A “Letters Received” column will appear in forthcoming issues for those who wish to respond to or amplify a previously appearing item. To be published, such letters must be phrased collegially, in a collaborative spirit of improving what is known. The editor retains the right to decide whether to publish a letter received.

Advice to Contributors:

- Accuracy is paramount.
- Focus on what is relevant to Union County history.
- Write about what you know best.
- Accompanying images (photos, maps, illustrations) are encouraged.
- The editor is happy to work with an author to strengthen the essay.

Technical Stipulations:

- Get consent of people and families mentioned; author bears sole responsibility for any objections raised.
- Photographs and other images can be included provided author has clear permission to use them.
- Original material please; previously published work is usually not accepted.
- Documents and lists can be included, but need to be explained and discussed in the author’s words.
- Analyses of specific pre-contact archaeological sites and artifacts are usually not accepted.
- Copyright is held by the Union County Historical Society; the author may republish or reuse his/her item without restriction. We ask that a subsequently re-published item that has previously appeared in ACCOUNTS cite its prior publication by the Society.

Editorial Decisions:

- The Union County Historical Society does not take a position on the content of any item.
- Editor may seek advice from an editorial board regarding any submission.
- Decisions by the Editor will be final.

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