

A Pretty Picture Is Worth a Great Story

By

M. Lois Huffines and Jack Fisher

While working on a pictorial history of Mifflinburg and the West End, to be published by Arcadia Publishing in 2012, Lois Huffines received word from John Dersham, a former Mifflinburg resident now living in Alabama, offering the use of photographs from the glass plate negatives of photographer William “Grover” Bierly. Bierly was active in Mifflinburg from about 1913 to 1917, and his images of Mifflinburg from the original glass plate negatives were a valuable addition to the images already owned by the Historical Society. The pictures were not identified, and John Dersham had only very sketchy information about some of them through an elderly uncle.

One photograph of family members in their backyard garden was



Photo courtesy of John Dersham, from the original glass negative.

especially appealing. It seemed to epitomize small town Mifflinburg culture of almost a century ago, but all that was known of the image was that it had been taken by Bierly around 1915. Who were the people in the photo, and what story did it tell? Dersham could add only that the picture was taken on Walnut Street, between Sixth and Eighth Streets. Jack Fisher, a volunteer researcher for the Union County Historical Society and expert at locating and interpreting records in the Prothonotary Office in the Courthouse, took a “road trip” to locate the house. The distinctive garage, pictured on the far left background of the photograph, still exists. Using a county map of Mifflinburg, with numbered lots, Jack was able to identify where the garden was located: behind the house at 630 Walnut Street.



The garage as it exists today in the alley behind Walnut Street. Photo courtesy of Jack Fisher.

By searching the 1910 census for Mifflinburg, Jack found living at that address in 1910 the following: John Kistler, head of household, age 22; Hannah

Kistler, wife, age 23; Julia, daughter, age 1 ½ ; Emily Foster, boarder, age 29; Helen Foster, age 4; and Lucretia Foster, age 2. By 1915, when Bierly photographed the group, Julia was 6, Helen 9, and Lucretia 7. John Kistler was a barber, and, given that the man in the photo wears an armband, it was suggested that barbers traditionally wore an arm band to keep their sleeves out of the way. His shop was probably the small, well-kept building in the background of the photograph at the edge of the garden.

By the 1920 census, Emily Foster with her husband John Foster and their children, including Helen and Lucretia, lived in State College Borough. Emily, with Helen and Lucretia, had boarded at the Kistlers while John established a medical practice in State College. By 1920, Hannah Kistler and her daughter Julia, now age 11, had moved in with Hannah's mother, Agnes Guyer. Agnes Guyer was listed as head of household and proprietor of a hotel; Hannah was manager of the hotel. The hotel was the Hotel Hopp at 264 Chestnut Street, the present-day Mifflinburg Hotel and Scarlet D Tavern. The Kistler house at 630 Walnut St. had been sold to George Roger and his wife Jennie in 1920. John Kistler was no longer in the picture, literally as well as photographically.

As we look at the photograph of the family in the garden, an explanatory story comes to mind. On an early summer Sunday afternoon with everyone dressed in their Sunday best clothes, Helen and Lucretia Foster visited the Kistler's, having brought Julia a doll which Julia clutches happily close to her body. John Kistler had Sunday off, and he and Hannah proudly stand in their lush garden with their daughter and her friends.

Only the scenario did not quite work that way.

In the photograph collection of the Union County Historical Society is a photo of the Hotel Hopp kitchen as the kitchen staff poses around a woman holding a pan of roasted chicken. As manager of the Hotel Hopp, Hannah was well-known for her Sunday chicken dinners. We can now devise a second story for the Bierly photograph. Lois and Jack were convinced that the two adults in the garden were John and Emily Foster. They had come to visit Hannah and

Julia from State College with their daughters. The other girls do not have dolls, and Julia is so enamored with hers, that it was surely a gift brought for the



Hannah Kistler and her kitchen staff in the Hotel Hopp.
Photo from the collection of the Union County Historical Society.

occasion. Hannah, wanting a picture of her guests/friends and of Julia with the doll, had Bierly take the photograph.

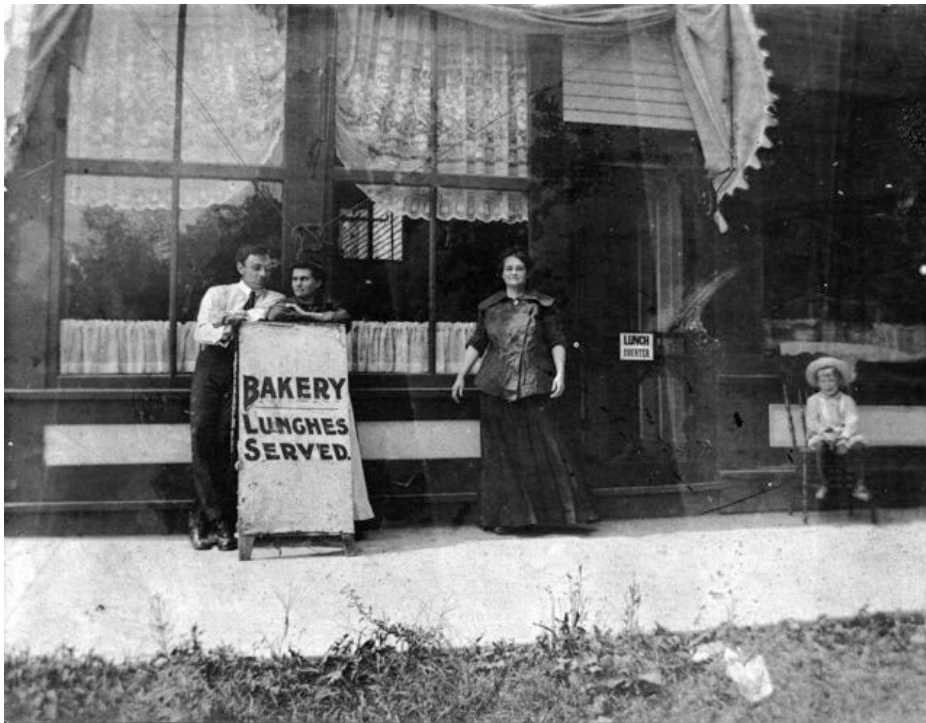
This second scenario is likely, given how the story continues to unfold. Through <ancestry.com>, Jack discovered a granddaughter of Julia, Susan Chlebek of Wyandotte, Michigan, who sent him other family photographs of Hannah and Julia. In addition, Lois discovered two additional photographs in the Historical Society's collection (see next page) that featured Hannah and Julia and the hotel.

Alfred A. Hopp and his wife Sarah sold the Hotel Hopp to Agnes (Baker) Guyer, Hannah Kistler's mother, on August 23, 1920 for \$17,500. Agnes died on July 17, 1923, of a stroke, as was reported by the Mifflinburg Telegraph.

She had first managed the Buffalo Valley Inn at the corner of Fourth and



Hannah Kistler and her daughter Julia.
Photo courtesy of Susan Chlebek.



Hannah Kistler, in the dark dress, and her young daughter Julia in front of Hopp Inn.
Photo from the collection of the Union County Historical Society.

Chestnut; several years later Agnes and Hannah were asked to be the house mothers of Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity in State College, and they were there until 1918, when they moved back to Mifflinburg and bought the Hotel Hopp, changing

its name to Hopp Inn. Hannah became the hotel owner after Agnes died. Hannah died in 1954.

Susan Chlebek sent a few more photographs of Julia Kistler. We see her in one photograph dressed for May Day. Julia graduated from Mifflinburg High



Julia, a 1926 graduate of Mifflinburg High School on May Day.



Julia Kistler and her husband Francis Smith on their wedding day.

Photos courtesy of Susan Chlebek

School in 1926. She married Francis Smith on June 9, 1931. It was quite a social event, and we have photographs of that occasion, also courtesy of Susan Chlebek. Julia and Francis had four children and resided in Kansas City, Missouri. Julia died on February 21, 2001.



Julia throws her wedding bouquet from the balcony of the Hopp Inn to the women below as her husband watches. Photo courtesy of Susan Chlebek.

Francis Smith and Julia sold Hopp Inn after Hannah's death to Albert Scholl and his wife Florence for \$15,000. Susan Chlebek's aunt, Julia's daughter Mary Louise (Molly) Smith, still has the doll today, preserved with only one shoe missing.

With the help of the additional photos and information, we can now tell a fuller story of the Bierly photograph. From left to right, the people are Lucretia Foster, Julia Kistler, Helen Foster, Emily Foster, and John Foster. They are pictured in the garden belong to the Kistlers. The Fosters, having boarded with the Kistlers, return for a visit, bringing young Julia a doll. The doll exists today, and by its presence, connects five generations of the Kistler family: Agnes, Hannah, Julia, Julia's daughter Francis Ann (Sally) Smith, and Susan Chlebek, Julia's granddaughter.



Julia's doll today, almost 100 years old, with only one shoe missing, is a connection to the past that ultimately links five generations. Photo courtesy of Susan Chlebek.

✧ **ACCOUNTS** ✧

**Emigration of Union County, Pennsylvania, Families
to Stephenson County, Illinois, and
Green County, Wisconsin, 1837-1847**

**By
Timothy J. Ryan**

In the late 1700s the central Susquehanna was on the frontier for those seeking land to settle. Within a few decades the frontier had moved on. In this essay I describe a migration in the 1830s and 1840s from Union County westward to Stephenson County, Illinois, undertaken by a group of my ancestors as open land further west beckoned anew.

Robert Chambers, a Scotch-Irishman from County Antrim, Ireland, immigrated to this country in 1726 with his three brothers, Benjamin, Joseph and James and settled first at the confluence of Fishing Creek and the Susquehanna River just north of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

In 1730 he became one of the original 1730 settlers of Middle Springs, Pennsylvania. He bought 300 acres and built a mill and farm and with others established the Middle Spring Presbyterian Church in 1738.

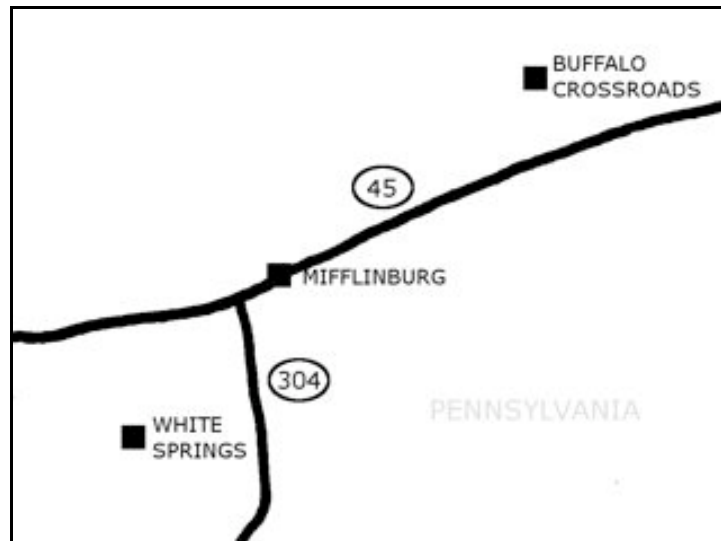
In 1777 he started looking for new farmland to settle 60 miles farther north in Pennsylvania in what now is Union County, Pennsylvania. He had lost his first wife and had married his second wife Mary Caldwell in 1753 when he was 50 years old and she was 18 years old. Mary was daughter of a neighbor to Robert and in an old land deed the marriage is listed as “arranged” as part of a land deal. Despite the age difference the couple had nine children between their marriage date and his death about 1781.

In 1776 he purchased 400 acres of land a couple of miles northeast of White Springs in Union County. The area was the wild frontier at the time and a dangerous location for white people to settle. He moved briefly to the area in spring of 1779 but was chased out by the Indians who lived in the area. When his son James, a militia man, was killed by Indians in 1780 Robert moved his family

temporarily to near Carlisle, Pennsylvania and it was there in 1781 he died from injuries he received when trying to mount a horse. He was 78 when he died.

Robert's wife and his nine children returned to Union County in 1783 and with the help of four Negro slaves began to develop the farm after the Indian uprising had subsided. His son Joseph was a youngster in 1783 but he took over the farm at an early age and made it successful.

A neighbor, Squire Robert Barber had moved to Union County about that same time from Columbia, Pennsylvania. Robert had a number of children and soon Joseph married Mary Boude Barber, Robert Barber's daughter. Together Joseph and Mary Chambers had eleven children including my great-great grandfather Benjamin Chambers.



Joseph and Mary Chambers, Robert Barber and their siblings all had large families. Most families at that time had ten or more children. All the children from this large extended family of Chambers and Barbers reached adult age of 18 in the early 1810's through the middle 1830's. The economy in this fledgling country of America was not good and farming, being the major way to make a living was limited because of the shortage of tillable land in Union County. All these children needed to find a way to make a living. It appears that the draw of inexpensive government land on the western frontier about 700 miles west promised a future for this large extended family.

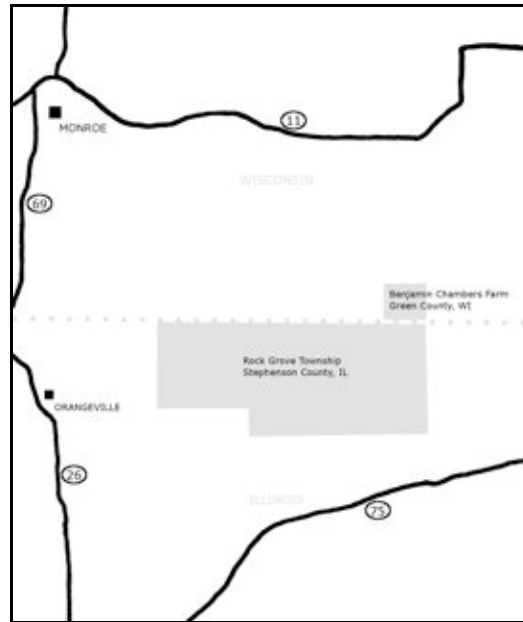
Dr. John Van Valzah was a physician in the Buffalo Crossroads area of Pennsylvania. He had two sons, Robert and Thomas, who also became physicians. When a young man, Dr. Thomas Van Valzah lived in the Union County area and had a sister who was married to Robert Barber, son of Squire Robert Barber.

Sometime around 1834-35, Dr. Thomas Van Valzah along with some other community leaders, including Robert Barber and possibly Samuel and Thomas Chambers from Union County, traveled to the future county of Stephenson in north central Illinois. They were scouting for land for people from Pennsylvania and discovered what they sought, sending word back home. Dr. Van Valzah and the Barber family purchased some land. Dr. Van Valzah put up a couple of cabins on his land. (Union County Pennsylvania, a Celebration of History by Charles M. Snyder, 1976, revised 2000. Page 44.)

Interestingly the next mention of the Van Valzeh, Barber and Chambers names comes in April 18, 1837 when a group of people from Union County led by Dr. Thomas Van Valzeh, a physician with substantial financial means, and Henry Barber set out from Union County by wagon for Stephenson County. With them were Joseph Green, Carpenter Miller, John Fisher Jr., John Glover Jr., and Nathan and Israel Sheetz. Both Van Valzah and Barber were cousins of Samuel and Thomas Chambers. Upon arrival in Illinois on May 30, 1837, seven weeks after they had left Pennsylvania, Dr. Van Valzah purchased a gristmill, built a sawmill and set up his practice of medicine. Henry Barber stayed in Illinois for 18 months and then returned to Union County where he again spread the word of the new land of opportunity.

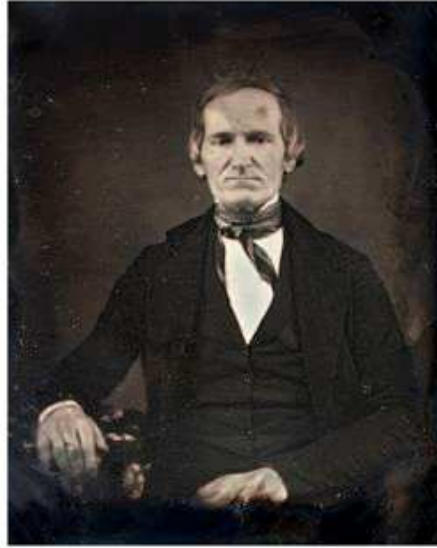
In 1835, Joseph Chamber's sons Samuel and Thomas Chambers decided to go west. It is not clear if these two brothers did this independently or was part of the Dr. Van Valzeh original scouting party. In the history of Stephenson County it is mentioned Dr. Van Valzah came with other people from Pennsylvania but does not mention the Chambers brothers by name. In The History of Stephenson County Illinois, by M. H. Tilden, 1880, page 733, Samuel and Thomas Chambers are mentioned to have stopped in Jo Davies County, Illinois for a short time and in 1836 claimed land in Rock Grove Township, Stephenson County, Illinois. In

1836, history books indicate the two were among the first 20 white settlers in the township (see *The History of Stephenson County, Illinois*, by M. H. Tilden, 1880 on page 483). They found the area to have good farmland with plenty of water. The topography of Rock Grove township is similar to what they were familiar with in Union County. They bought Federal land in Sections 19 and 24 in Rock Grove township.



The brothers sent word back to Union County of what they discovered and may have urged their siblings and cousins to join them out west. It is logical that Dr. Van Valzeh, Robert Barber, Samuel and Thomas Chambers were all doing this venture together since all were related by marriage and came from the same geographical area of West Buffalo Township in Union County, Pennsylvania. I can find no family records from any of the three families, however, that confirm that conclusion.

Later in 1838, Barber cousins and Joseph Chambers' sons Robert and James headed west and joined Samuel and Thomas Chambers. The year after



Benjamin Chambers, born in Union County in 1807 and died in Union County in 1872 when he was visiting from his new home in Jefferson Township, Green County, Wisconsin. Photo courtesy of the author.

that in 1839 brother Benjamin Chambers, my direct line great-great grandfather became the fifth brother to emigrate to Rock Grove township in Stephenson county. The Barber and Chambers families all bought federal land in Sections 13, 17, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 30 and 31 all in Rock Grove Township. Benjamin Chambers soon after in 1847 purchased land from William Baker in the Town of Jefferson in Green County, Wisconsin. That farm sat directly across the state line from his land holdings in Rock Grove Township. He eventually sold the Illinois property and consolidated his holdings in Wisconsin.



Benjamin Chambers Farm, Green County Wisconsin, early 1900's
Photo courtesy of the author.

In 1842, Dr. Thomas Van Valzeh and his family moved back to Union County. History records indicate two Van Valzeh physicians, sons of Dr. Thomas Van Valzeh, remained in Stephenson County and practiced medicine.

The last large emigration of people from Union County to Stephenson County left Union County some time in May 1843. A short note in the Clarion Pennsylvania Register newspaper says "On May 31, 1843 a company of about 60 emigrants passed through this place on their way to Stephenson County, Illinois. They had 14 wagons, each drawn by a span of horses. They were all from one neighborhood and had plenty of cash. They were in good spirits."

In the book, History of Stephenson County, Illinois, page 742 it reports that a group of 54 people arriving from Union County, Pennsylvania in 1843. It is my thought the arriving group in Stephenson County was the same group mentioned as moving through Clarion. The fourteen-wagon train was led by brothers Samuel, George, and Thomas Barber, who all were cousins of Samuel and Thomas Chambers who had arrived in Illinois eight years earlier.

By the mid 1840's, then, we know there were at least 100 people who had left Union County and relocated in Northern Stephenson County, Illinois. While these emigrants to Illinois were called "Pennsylvania Dutch" they actually were a melting pot of nationalities. Indeed some were "Dutch" like the prominent Van Valzeh family, but also some were German like the Musser family, and still others were English like the Barber family. But the first of this group of mislabeled emigrants were the Chambers who clearly are "Scotch-Irish." After arriving in Illinois all of the names of families on the various arrival lists ended up mixing the family names together through marriage. In my direct line alone you will find the names of Musser, Chambers, Glover, Barber, Wright and Van Valzeh.

Interestingly, a little over 100 years after Scotch-Irishman Robert Chambers (1703-1782) and his brothers, Benjamin, Joseph and James arrived in Philadelphia (1726) from Ireland their ancestors were now truly Americans. They enjoyed the independence their ancestors fought for in the Revolutionary War. They could live where they chose to live, could marry whom they chose to marry and could practice the religion they chose to practice. The families were now a melting pot of nationalities. These western pioneers were responsible hard-

working Americans living the dream that their parents and grandparents could only imagine. Now in the mid 1800's the Scotch Irish brothers, grandchildren, and great grandchildren were not only enjoying their freedom but also contributing to population growth across America.

Key Sources:

1. The Robert Chambers Family of Middle Springs, PA and Buffalo Valley. Date and author unknown.
2. Chambers Family Genealogy by James Randall Chambers, 1928.
3. The History of Stephenson County, Illinois, by M. H. Tilden, 1880.
4. Union County Pennsylvania, a Celebration of History by Charles M. Snyder, 1976, revised 2000, page 44.

The author thanks Katy Lowitz for producing the maps used in this article.



The Story Behind the Pictures

by

Glenda Sheaffer

When we think about the history of Union County we tend to focus on prominent families, whose wealth, property holdings, and political decisions make them visible to us, generations later. But the success of those families would not have happened had there not been the far larger number of the county's more ordinary citizens whose labors and lives underpin our area's daily life. Unlike the county's well known families, the small holders faced life's challenges with few defenses and fewer options, relying especially on their links to family and neighbor, and hard work to deal with the heavy challenges that life sent their way.

There have now been seven generations of descendents since Henry Bennage returned from the Civil War to White Deer township and his wife, Sarah Brown. The lives of Henry and Sarah, and of those who came after them across the 19th and 20th centuries chronicle personal struggles and satisfactions that were surely part of the lives of many persons living in Union County in those times.

Henry Simon "Simon" Bennage was a 33-year-old farmer in White Deer Township. He was married to Sarah Brown, who died in 1907 and they were the parents of seven children. In 1864 he became a drafted Civil War soldier.ⁱ He went to war with a local friend, Paul Dieffenderfer. His brother, Enos, was already a member of the 199th P.V.I. and fought in most of the important battles of the war. Simon served in 76th P.V.I. for almost a year. During his war service he kept a diary detailing his activities and locations during multiple battles. Luckily he was uninjured and returned home in July 1865.

Within 10 months of Simon's return, their eighth child, George, was born. Simon continued to keep diaries of his farm life. "His diaries give an account of the daily life of his family on the farm in that day, many of the farm chores done by hand, threshing etc., making shutters for the house, repairing the few farm implements in the farm

	Henry Simon Bennage	m 1852 to	Sarah Brown		
	1831 - 1917		1829 - 1907		
/		/			
David	Henry Musser	m 1884 to	Ellen Jane Bennage	m 1902 to	Francis Dunkleberger
Mary Agnes	1853 - 1897		1864-1925		abt 1874 - abt 1925
Elizabeth	/	/			/
John	Ralph C.	George W. Musser m 1916 to	Florence E. Walter		Paul
Catharine	Mary M.	1897 - 1977	1895 - 1976		Elmer
Susanna	Sarah	/	/		Mildred
George	Raymond	Marlin	Freda E. Musser never married private		
	Jennie	Gladys	1921 to		
	James	Nevin	/		
		George Jr.	Janet B. Musser m 1955 to	Glenn G. Shively	
		Florine	1939 to	1936 to	
		Beatrice	/	/	
			Lisa Ann	Glenda Lee Shively m 1973 to	Harry Lee Zimmerman
			1958	1955 to	1955 to
				/	/
				Bonnie Lee Zimmerman m 1997 to Kevin Paul Roush	
				1976 to	1974
				/	/
				Breanna Lee Roush	Kolby Paul Roush
				2001	2004

blacksmith shop. Apparently the farm had a variety of shops including shoemaking, carpentry, etc. The women were baking (bread, pies), quilting, sewing, canning and preserving the food. The social life revolved about the church, the Grange, husking and quilting bees, the G.A.R. [Grand Army of the Republic], visiting among friends and relatives, bobsledding for the young folks" (quoted from Ralph Kostenbader, *Ancestors and History of the Bennage and Brown Families*, 1974).ⁱⁱ

Simon's daughter, Ellen Jane Bennage, was born in 1864 and married Henry Musser in 1884. Henry, born in 1853, was an orphan from Snyder County. His father died before 1860 and after a remarriage, his mother died in 1862. Henry was then raised by his uncle, Levi Musser. By the census of 1880 he was a laborer at a neighboring farm. Ellen Jane and Henry had seven children in 13 years. The last child to this union, George W., was born in 1896. Three months later his father, Henry, died of kidney disease.

Left with 7 surviving children to raise alone, Ellen Jane gave baby George to her father, Simon, to raise. Simon, his wife Sarah and eventually his two unmarried daughters, Mary Agnes and Elizabeth, raised George as their own. George's daughter Freda still says that "he never spent another night at his mother's after going to Simon's."

Ellen Jane struggled to support her family. "Her family lived in one of the Simon Bennage properties on High St., West Milton, east of the railroad crossing on the south

corner. After the death of her father in 1917, she received this property as part of her share of the Simon Bennage estate. She remodeled the property in the early 1920's, making a double frame house. She had a hard life providing for the family after the death of her first husband. Shortly after the birth of three children in



Henry Simon Bennage, daughter Ellen Jane Bennage Musser
Dunkleberger, George W. Musser, Marlin Musserⁱⁱⁱ c.1917

the second marriage, she was left with the same circumstances of raising the family by herself. (Her husband, Frank, was admitted to Danville State Hospital.) She was employed by the Reading Railroad Co. at the station as a janitress and supplemented her income wherever she could find work" (quoted from Ralph Kostenbader, *Ancestors and History of the Bennage and Brown Families*, 1974).

To survive, Ellen Jane did receive public assistance when necessary which was paid back from her estate. Her son, Raymond, lost his wife in the Flu Epidemic of 1918 and Ellen Jane took his three small children to raise. Ellen Jane died in 1925 of cancer. Her granddaughter, Freda, believes she remembers Ellen Jane on the couch during her illness. The house that Ellen Jane owned was bought by Raymond and was eventually

razed after the 1972 flood. Baby George lived in Henry Simon's brick house until he married. The house still stands on the west corner Crossroads and Milroy Roads near the JPM intersection. The house was made from clay from the pond and field that lay in front of it.

George never said much about his childhood though he repeated the story about how the house was built. It is assumed he worked on the farm like most boys did in that time. He fell in love with the neighbor's daughter, Florence Walter, who lived in the house over the hill with her parents, Palmer and Fianna Walter. Palmer



Back from left: Freda Musser (dau of George); Glenda (nee Shively) Zimmerman (now Sheaffer gr granddaughter of Geo); Janet Musser Shively Russell (granddaughter of Geo). Front and center: George W. Musser holding, his gr gr granddaughter Bonnie Lee Zimmerman

and Fianna were tenant farmers on the land across the road from the Bennage house. The home in which they lived now stands abandoned on JPM road near the Crossroads intersection.

George and Florence had 6 of 7 children survive to adulthood. They tenant farmed and eventually bought a farm. During the Depression they lost the farm and they again went tenant farming. They continued to do so the rest of their working years. They moved often to better the terms of their tenancy. During the really rough times George worked on the WPA (Works Progress Administration) in the mountains building bridges and roads. His daughter said he almost froze to death when on this job. He and Florence grew almost everything they ate. They also traded or sold produce for the items they couldn't provide for themselves. Eventually, they sold out, left the farm and

moved to a small home in Mifflinburg in 1956. They lived contentedly for the remainder of their years. George occasionally worked in the local silk mills. They were married over 60 years.

George and Florence's daughter, Freda, lived next door with her daughter, Janet. I, daughter of Janet, was fortunate enough to know George and Florence through my childhood and early adult years. Florence died in 1976 and George passed way in 1977 when I was 22.

George in his old fashioned way kept telling me not to rush life but the minute I was married he wanted to know when I was having a baby. I was fortunate enough to give him his great great granddaughter, Bonnie, nine months before his death. He was a happy man and enjoyed entertaining the children of which I was one.

Today, 2012, his 90-year-old daughter, my grandmother, Freda still talks of her life within this family.

Notes

ⁱ Simon's Civil War diary has been transcribed and made into a booklet. Copies can be provided on request. The UCHS has one on hand.

ⁱⁱ Ralph Kostenbader, Freda's first cousin, was the original genealogist to work on the family. I continued his work to complete my line.

ⁱⁱⁱ Marlin was the first child of George W. and Florence (Walter) Musser. He was a farm laborer after high school and later for Penn Dot. He died in 1970.



Lewisburg's Presidential Connection

by

Stanley Zellers

For a small town in central Pennsylvania, Lewisburg has had her fair share of notables – men who took their place on the national stage - men like Eli Slifer, who served as Secretary of the Commonwealth during the Civil War, or Tasker Bliss, Black Jack Pershing's Chief of Staff during World War I. But a man with ties to Lewisburg nominated for the presidency of the United States? It's true, and it's part of what I consider to be one of the more fascinating stories of the Civil War era.

Up until the mid 1850s the Whigs and the Democrats had played loyal opposition to each other. But now, spawned by the seething cauldron of anti-slavery sentiment that held tightly to so many in the North, a new political force called the Republican Party had been born. The first national convention of this new party convened in Chicago in May 1860 at a place called the Wigwam, built especially for the event. The front-runner, the man most thought to be a shoo-in, was Senator William Seward of New York.

The process of nominating a presidential candidate today is sterile and anticlimactic in comparison to what it was in the mid-19th century. Today's extended primary season, with its never-ending news coverage, polls du jour, and managed men and messages is a pale likeness of the process back then. The nominating convention was THE main event, full of high drama (and hi-jinks), smoke-filled (literally) back room dealings, and intrigues of all kinds. For anyone who might feel put off by today's political antics I suggest reading the history of the Chicago Republican convention of May 1860.

Out of the yeasty atmosphere in Chicago would, of course, come the Republican Party's first nominee and first President – Abraham Lincoln.

Today's process awards delegates to candidates on a state by state basis as the candidates make their way through each state's primary. By the time the convention arrives, the nominee is generally a foregone conclusion. The conventions seem more of an opportunity for each party to rally their base, introduce rising stars, and generally put

forth the message they hope will get their candidate elected. In the usual case the naming of the candidate is almost an afterthought – certainly not the highlight of the event in my estimation.

Not so in Chicago in May 1860.

In spite of Seward's perceived inevitability, there were Lincoln operatives who saw the chinks in Seward's political armor. Four states – New Jersey, Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania – were thought to be still up in the air. If Lincoln could secure the delegates from three of those states, he would overcome Seward's early lead and secure the nomination. The Lincoln men went to work on each delegation.

The head of the Pennsylvania delegation was Simon Cameron. Cameron's biographical information reveals a man of intense ambition. By the time of the 1860 convention he had already served as president of two railroad companies, owned and edited a newspaper, served as adjutant general of Pennsylvania, and been elected to the United States Senate twice.



Simon Cameron, photo by Matthew Brady, courtesy of Betty Cook.

In an era when ambitious men had only to reach for the brass ring, Cameron's drive and desire for power placed him on par with other, equally driven men – Charles Sumner, Salmon P Chase, William Seward, Judson Kilpatrick, and Dan Sickles, to name

a few. Cameron's grip on the Pennsylvania delegation placed power in the hands of a man who knew how to wield it. On the morning of May 18, just before the convention was to be called to order and the voting of delegates to begin, Cameron sent an emissary to the Lincoln men. He (Cameron) would swing the Pennsylvania delegation into the Lincoln column provided two conditions were met: 1) he would be named Secretary of the Treasury in Lincoln's cabinet, and 2) he would be given absolute power to dispense political patronage in the Commonwealth.

This was too much for Lincoln's agents to swallow. They immediately telegraphed Lincoln (in the custom of the day, candidates did not attend the convention) seeking counsel. Back came the reply "I authorize no bargains and will be bound by none."

At this point the history becomes a bit fuzzy. Some claim a deal was struck with Cameron, others, after years of research, determined to the contrary. Regardless, what is known is that the Pennsylvania delegation DID eventually vote for Lincoln, and that Cameron was appointed Secretary of War, not Secretary of the Treasury. So far as the issue of patronage goes, Andrew Curtin, who was at the time a rising star in Pennsylvania politics and who would be a stalwart Lincoln ally throughout the war, apparently found a way to blunt Cameron's demand.

Whether Cameron's demands were acquiesced to, hemmed and hawed around, or just plain rejected, there remained one final bit of theater that Cameron's ego had to have. By prior agreement with Lincoln's operatives, the first round of nominees on the morning of May 18 dutifully included Simon Cameron from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for President of the United States. Of course this was a ceremonial gesture, and Cameron had no chance of actually receiving the nomination, but he was that powerful a figure. He had coerced from those who needed the push he would provide this one last ounce of satisfaction. He garnered 50½ votes on the first ballot. On the second ballot, the Pennsylvania delegation swung into Lincoln's column, and history was set on the path we know.

Cameron's tenure as Secretary of War lasted roughly a year. Many see him as corrupt. He himself was quoted as saying "An honest politician is one who, when he is bought, will stay bought." Thaddeus Stevens, congressman from Pennsylvania, when discussing Cameron's honesty with Lincoln, told Lincoln "I don't think that he would steal a red hot stove". When Cameron demanded Stevens retract this statement, Stevens

told Lincoln "I believe I told you he would not steal a red-hot stove. I will now take that back."

Instead of corruption, Cameron may have simply been overwhelmed. Putting a country on war footing overnight would take a superhuman effort. Those who point to his shortcomings may want to consider the enormous challenges he faced in the early days of the war.

Love him or hate him, he is a part of history – one of the men who helped Abraham Lincoln achieve his paramount objective – to preserve the Union. And, as we know, he does have ties to Lewisburg.

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Letters from Eli Slifer, 1861

by

Jessica Owens

Born in 1818 in Chester County, Eli Slifer moved to Union County as a young boy but was forced to return to his hometown in 1831 to live with relatives after becoming orphaned. Slifer walked 100 miles to Lewisburg in 1834 to become a hat maker's apprentice and soon found employment in the canal boat industry, marrying Catharine Motter Frick of Northumberland in 1840. The couple had eight children but unfortunately three children passed away in youth. A year later, Slifer became a junior business partner at brother-in-law William Frick's canal barge firm. Slifer began his own farm



Portraits of Eli and Catharine Slifer, circa 1870. Portraits are photographs overdrawn with charcoal and are currently displayed at the Slifer House Museum. Used with permission of Slifer House Museum.

manufacturing company named Slifer, Walls, and Shriner in 1845 and for twenty-five years he gained respect from the community as well as a small fortune, which in turn impelled him to become active in Pennsylvania politics.

First serving as a member of the State Assembly, then as Whig senator of the State Senate, Slifer resigned from his three-term position as treasurer of the Commonwealth in 1861 after being named secretary of the Commonwealth by Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin. Slifer's new position, only second to that of the governor, required him to raise and deploy troops and supplies from Pennsylvania to the Union Army and at times placed him in charge of state affairs during Governor Curtin's periods of illness. The beginning of the Civil War and his new position as Secretary of the Commonwealth were not the only major changes to Slifer's life in 1861. Slifer and his family prepared to move into their newly erected, 21-room Italianate mansion built on nearly 200-acres known as the Delta Place and



Image of the Slifer residence in 1867. Photograph includes the family on the porch for a homecoming celebration after Eli Slifer's retirement from the office of Secretary of the Commonwealth.

Photo courtesy of Slifer House Museum

designed by prominent architect Samuel Sloan of Chester County. There was little time for Slifer to celebrate his new position and home, however, as duties of war beckoned him to office in Harrisburg.

Twelve letters from Eli Slifer to his wife, Catharine, dated March 7 to December 30, 1861 (with the exception on one undated letter) express the growing fear and mutual anxieties of husband and wife after Slifer departed. Always addressed to "My Dear Catharine" and signed "Affectionately Yours," the romantic lines of Slifer's letters provide insight into the progress of the war and its effects on religion and life at home. Slifer discusses in his letters his position as Secretary of the

Commonwealth, travel and health, and longing to be back at the farm with his family. The letters also contain details on items purchased by Slifer for the new house and the roles of Catharine and her children at their Lewisburg residence. One letter in particular serves as a snapshot of the Slifers' lives during the first year of the Civil War:

Harrisburg, Pa. April 22, 1861

My Dear Catharine,

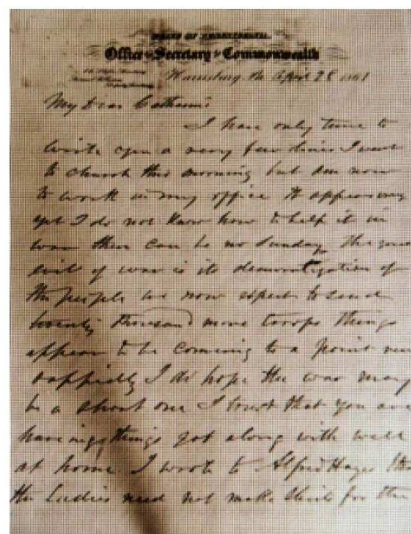
I have only time to say a word or two to show that amid the noise and confusion of this army camp, I have not forgotten you. I feel better than I did but I need rest. The Lewisburg boys left last night for Philadelphia to go on to protect the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. The poor fellows will soon find that war is a terrible thing. We had no Sunday yesterday. I slipped away long enough to hear Cookman in the morning. In the evening I had to work. I wish you would write me very fully stating how you are getting along. Let the boys hurry up the corn ground. I would have Palmer finish the spring house and ice house and all the other work that is to be done around the farm. I suppose you have had the grape seed sown about the house and in the orchard. As soon as you can dispense with the nursery man you should do so since the cattle are now sold. Chopper can work the garden. You should have some melons planted in the sandy ground below the barn, and it is also time to have a little early corn out. I may possibly come home soon if it is only to be at home an hour or two.

Very affectionately yours,
Eli Slifer

The beginning of the Civil War was marked with the Confederate troops attacking a U.S. Military installation at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, on April 12, just ten days before Slifer wrote his letter home to his beloved Catharine. Lincoln responded by calling for a volunteer army from each state, with a reported 75,000 men called to suppress the Southern uprising. As Secretary of the Commonwealth, Slifer would

have raised and deployed troops from Pennsylvania for the Union. Perhaps the “Lewisburg boys” sent to guard the canal Slifer referred to were men of the Third Pennsylvania Light Artillery Battery B, one of the twelve companies of the Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery. A deeply religious man, Slifer writes to Catharine of his disappointment that he had no time for worship and rest on Sunday and even had to work in the evening, however he manages to slip away in the morning to hear “Cookman” who likely gave a short sermon. Slifer later mentions in a letter written on April 28, “In war there can be no Sunday. The great evil of war is its demoralization of the people.”

After giving his account of his situation during the rising war, Slifer turns his thoughts to life at home. Seemingly anxious about Catharine running the home and farm in his absence, Slifer requests that she respond to his letter with a full account of happenings at home and proceeds to give a list of chores that need to be completed by his wife, three sons, and the farm hands. His reminders to his Catharine include tilling the land for the corn crop and garden for vegetables, completing the construction of spring and icehouses, and planting the grape seed, corn, and watermelon.



Copy of a letter written on official office stationery from Secretary of the Commonwealth Eli Slifer to his wife, Catharine Slifer, dated April 28, 1861. The letters are currently housed in Bucknell University Archives.

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Slifer ends the letter with a wishful thought that he might slip away from his duties to join his family. Despite his deepest desires to come home, Slifer many times found himself a prisoner of his duties.

The letters show Slifer to be a dedicated leader of the state and a devoted husband and father. On April 22, six days before sending the letter above, Slifer wrote to Catharine, "I am so busy that I cannot say more than that this town is full of soldiers. You must do the best you can. I depend very much on you." Nervous to leave his wife to managing the 200-acre farm and its staff, in addition to her normal household duties, Slifer displays both anxiety of being parted from his homestead and confidence that his wife can take care of the family and farm. On July 6, he writes to his wife, "If the boys have nothing else to do they should get the posts from Beam & Kreammers. And they might do the necessary sodding about the yard whenever you think the time is right." Despite the chaos of wartime, Slifer takes time to write instructions on how to manage the property. He expresses love for his family and concern for his health, as an excerpt from a letter written on December 30 demonstrates:

Yesterday was a very long day to me indeed as it usually is when I am away from home. I have thought much of you and the children. I have so much pain about my breast that I fear my heart is growing weak. A friend of mine, L[?] McClure of Pittsburg, fell dead last week of heart disease. I am very anxious for you and the children to learn to manage the farm. Do you think you could if I should be called away suddenly?

The letters from 1861 also serve as a glance into the events of war and the roles of both men and women. On April 28, as the war was beginning, Slifer writes, "I wrote to Alfred Hayes that the ladies need not make shirts for the men who are now at camp. They may see to

equipping the next company. The state will furnish the men now in service before you could reach them.” Women played a crucial role in aiding the war, with ladies forming organizations such as the United States Christian and United States Sanitary Commissions and donating clothing and goods to churches and hospitals. Slifer also reports in the same letter, “We now expect to send twenty thousand more troops. Things appear to be coming to a point very rapidly. I do hope the war may be a short one.” Slifer, like many, would have never guessed that the war would continue for an additional three years. Other lines discuss progress of the war, including a letter from September 22 that reads of a “great victory” for the Union on the North Carolina Coast. Perhaps Slifer was referring to the Union Navy destroying the fort defending the inlet at Ocracoke, North Carolina.

The original letters from 1861 are in a larger collection and located in the Register of the Slifer-Walls Collection, Bucknell University Archives, Bertrand Library. Lynett Chilson, Dana Intern, compiled the collection from 1989-1991. Doris Dysinger, a special collections and university archives specialist, served as the project coordinator. Copies of the original letters from Eli to Catharine, including selected letters from Eli to Catharine from 1853 to 1867, as well as transcriptions of the 1861 letters, are available to the public at Slifer House Museum. The letters have the ability to help a reader imagine life of the past during the time of a disrupted home front and turbulent war, through the vivid descriptions of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, Eli Slifer, to his beloved wife.

Recommendations for Further Reading

Reed, Doris Hartley. *Delta Place: 1769-1976*. Print. (No additional publishing information.)

Delta Place is a small book compiled by Doris Hartley Reed, who helped to preserve Slifer House from demolition in 1972 with the help of her husband, the late David L. Reed, the first administrator of Lewisburg United Methodist Homes, now RiverWoods Senior Living Community. Reed prepared the application to nominate the property to the Pennsylvania Register of Historic Places and served as

chairperson of the History Committee during the preservation and restoration of Slifer House. The book is available at Slifer House Museum.

Godcharles, Frederic Antes. *Chronicles of Central Pennsylvania*. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company.

<http://collection1.libraries.psu.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/digitalbks2&CISOPTR=10777&REC=1>

*Compiled by Frederick A. Godcharles, a historian, author and former State Librarian of Pennsylvania, *Chronicles of Central Pennsylvania* provides insight not only into the history of the land and families of Union and surrounding counties, but also insight into the original landowner of Pennsylvania, William Penn. Penn had sold the plot of land to his two sons, Richard and Thomas Penn, that later became known as "Delta Place" and the site of the Slifer mansion.*

✧ ACCOUNTS ✧

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Union County Historical Society

ACCOUNTS

Published by the Union County Historical Society, Lewisburg PA

This Issue's Authors:

- A Union County native, **Jack Fisher** is a retired Controller and Materials Manager, and now a volunteer researcher for the Union County Historical Society.
- Having retired from Bucknell University, **M. Lois Huffines** recently completed four years as president of the Union County Historical Society.
- **Jessica Owens** graduated from Susquehanna University with a B.A. in Art History and is currently director of Slifer House Museum.
- **John Peeler** is professor emeritus of political science at Bucknell University, and a resident of Lewisburg since 1967.
- **Timothy J. Ryan**, a Chambers family genealogist is completing a book called "Ten Chambers." He lives in Virginia on a farm established in 1772.
- **Glenda (Shively) Sheaffer** came home in 1973 and enthusiastically pursues Union County genealogy and volunteers for the Historical Society.
- Lewisburg resident **Stan Zellers** has had a lifelong interest in the Civil War. You will find him in parades and 'on the field' with his regiment. The Union Forever!

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 needed.
- 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

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 re-publish or reuse his/her item without restriction.
A re-published item that has previously appeared in ACCOUNTS must 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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