

History of Clay and the Clay Hotel

This article is written for the purpose of giving a thorough history of the Hotel at Clay, Clay township, by whom erected, owned and operated to the present day; and many incidents connected with its history; also, some facts of the village of Clay, tracing the original title to 1681.

William Penn on September 27th, 1681, did grant and convey to Charles Jones, the elder, and Charles Jones, the younger, then of the city of Bristol, England—soap boilers—2,000 acres of land to be laid out in the province of Pennsylvania, yet unsurveyed. Charles Jones, Jr., died without issue and without making a partition of the property—Charles Jones, Sr., became the sole owner.

On November 4th, 1711, Charles Jones, Sr., granted and conveyed these 2,000 acres to Esther Shippen, then married to Edward Shippen. Said Edward Shippen also died and Esther Shippen, by survivorship, bequeathed on August 4th, 1724, as follows: "As for and concerning the rest and residue of said 2,000 acres (over and besides certain 500 acres and 40 acres in said will specified) where located and surveyed unto Edward Shippen and Joseph Shippen, sons of said Esther Shippen and to Margaret Shippen, daughter of her son-in-law, Edward Shippen, deceased each to receive 486 2-3 acres of the remaining 1,460 acres, when surveyed and granted by the proprietary of Pennsylvania."

This tract was surveyed in 1733, four years after the organization of Lancaster county.

Joseph Shippen, Jr., merchant, residing at Philadelphia, and Mary, his wife, sold 100 acres of his tract to Oswald Hostetter, on December 6th, 1740.

"The land is situated on a branch county." Middle creek was not yet named. The deed for the above mentioned tract of 100 acres is one of the first deeds recorded in Lancaster, as it appears in the first deed grantor book on page 29, recorded May 11th, 1741. Michael Shank and Oswald Hostetter are mentioned as adjoiners. Mr. Hostetter previously obtained 210 acres from the proprietaries of Pennsylvania.

Michael Shank obtained 388 acres from said Joseph Shippen, Jr., merchant, and Mary, his wife, at a previous date. Thus Shank and Hostetter purchased Joseph Shippen's share of the land. Most of Shank's land is owned by some of his descendants at this date—Samuel Steinmetz, Grant Steinmetz and F. S. Hess. This land is located in Elizabeth township.

As previously stated, the surveys were made in 1733, but not only of these tracts, but of nearly 4,000 acres embracing parts of the present confines of Clay and Elizabeth townships. The names, location and acreage are in our possession.

Oswald Hostetter died about 1751, leaving a widow, Mary; a son, John, and three daughters, Frena or Veronica, married to Abraham Herr; Anna, married to John Mayer, and Barbara, married to Samuel Singer.

John Hostetter, the son, was willed his father's both tracts of land, 210 and 100 acres, respectively, on July 23d, 1751.

On November 5th, 1766, John Hostetter and Barbara, his wife, of Warwick township, sold to Michael Huber, blacksmith, county and province

aforesaid, 13 acres of the 100-acre tract, without improvements, for 62 pounds, or about \$310. This would indicate that part of the land was located in Warwick township and part in Cocalico township, Hostetter residing in the Warwick end and the thirteen-acre tract in Cocalico, as will appear later on.

In order to prove that the thirteen-acre tract comes from the original 2,000 acres granted to the soapboilers—drafts and descriptions indicate it beyond a doubt.

John Hostetter, on May 26th, 1767, sold 182 acres of land, situated in Warwick township to Jacob Erb, of Warwick township, being parts of both tracts, as the title papers on record at Lancaster clearly show. Jacob Erb, however, did not reside on the tract until a later date. He was a noted and influential citizen. He was a member of the Committee of Safety during the Revolutionary War. He was a member of the State Legislature from 1787 to 1790. He was the great-great-grandfather of the writer.

Michael Huber, who purchased the thirteen-acre tract above mentioned, without improvements, on November 5th, 1766, erected the building on the land in 1767, which is now known as the Clay Hotel in Clay township. Grant Steinmetz is the present proprietor.

The original building was not as large and commodious a structure as at present, three additions being added to it since. The original building, however, yet stands and is a stone structure and able to stand the storms of another century.

It embraced what is now the bar-room and a small kitchen in the rear and two rooms above the bar-room.

Whether Mr. Huber conducted a hotel is not positively known and cannot be verified from the records in the

Quarter Sessions office at Lancaster, as those minutes are not all recorded. The licenses at that time were not granted by the Court, but were recommended by the Court to the Governor of the Province, who granted them.

However, tradition says it was a public house at that period, although Mr. Huber is again mentioned as blacksmith on March 26th, 1774, when he and his wife, Anna Maria, sold the property mentioned as in Cocalico township, with improvements, to Martin Shank, of Warwick township, for 500 pounds or about \$2,500. As far as known, Mr. Huber continued to occupy it as a tenant from the following incident given to the writer some years ago by two different descendants of the family:

“Michael Huber had two daughters in his family, Barbara and Christina.”

To show that the place was one of importance in this section of the county, a draft of soldiers for the Revolutionary War was taken at this house, and Christina Huber, then a little girl, was blindfolded and drew the names from a box in accordance with the usual custom.

Another important event in the lives of these two daughters, Barbara and Christina Huber, both had the same husband—Jacob Keller. Another coincidence—Mollie Erb married Samuel Keller, a son of the first union. Her brother, David Erb, married Barbara Keller, a daughter of the second union.

Both had many descendants.

Peter Eberly was also a tenant and conducted a public house at least from 1784 to 1789—the previous records failing to specify. During this period the building was enlarged by adding the wing on the west end or from the bar-room to the west end, being an addition of two rooms on each floor and somewhat better material—finer stone.

In 1789, Martin Shank, of Warwick township, sold this property to Peter Eberly, inn holder, then tenant, for the same price as he had purchased it in 1774, from Michael Huber—500 pounds, or \$2,500. But strange as it may seem, Peter Eberly and Catharine, his wife, disposed of it at the same time to Jacob Erb, already mentioned, who owned the land adjoining on the south, west and north, for 25 pounds, or about \$125 less than was paid for it to Mr. Shank. As an indication that Peter Eberly did not continue as tenant for Jacob Erb, as he had for Martin Shank—the records speak of him as a resident of Manheim township—evidently his new home.

By this purchase of the thirteen-acre tract, Jacob Erb restored it to the original tract of 100 acres from which it was taken in 1766, and it has not separated from the main part ever since.

My eyes beheld, I have in my possession a finely executed draft of this thirteen-acre plot.

Jacob Erb never occupied the hotel building himself. He owned the mill and all the land in and around the present village of Clay, and the farm to the southeast of the village now owned by Ben. S. Risser's estate.

He moved to the present village of Clay later in life. He resided in what was known as the "Corner House," which tradition says was an older house than the hotel building. It was demolished in 1911.

Mr. Erb died in this house in 1811, just a century apart.

Who was the first tenant of the hotel after it was purchased by Jacob Erb cannot be determined, as some of the records are missing. It is believed that Christian Young occupied it from 1793 to 1796.

Evidently it was vacant from the spring of 1796 until November, 1796. At the November Quarter Sessions Court a license was granted to Nathaniel Lightner, thus—"Jacob Erb's house old tavern." Mr. Lightner was granted license in the spring of 1797 and continued as landlord until the spring of 1805.

During the time that Nathaniel Lightner occupied the hotel it changed owners—John Erb, one of the sons of Jacob Erb, purchased it from his father, and also the farms and mill property.

Another important event took place at this time. From the organization of the county in 1729 until 1784 the county and State elections were held at the county seat.

In 1785 Lancaster county was erected into four election districts. Cocalico township belonged to the Fourth district, with the polling place at New Holland.

In 1786 Cocalico township was detached from the Fourth district and added to the First district, the Court house at Lancaster borough being the polling place.

In 1795 Cocalico and Elizabeth townships were erected into a separate election district, called the Fifth district, with the polling place at the public house of Henry Miller, in Cocalico township. It was situated on the cross-roads midway between Lincoln and Ephrata, and is now occupied by Samuel D. Erb.

In 1803 a new district was formed from parts of Brecknock and Cocalico townships, and called the Ninth district, with Reamstown, in Cocalico township, as the polling place.

Part of Warwick township was attached to the other part of Cocalico township, and the polling place of the

Fifth district was moved to Nathaniel Lightner's hotel, also in Cocalico township, or the Clay Hotel, as it is now called.

Thus, this house has continued to be a polling place to this day, even when it was kept as a private house by the late George W. Steinmetz, father of the writer, from 1855 to 1868.

However, an effort was made by the late William K. Furlow, in 1864, to have the polling place taken to his hotel, called Union, now Mount Airy, which name it bears since 1876, although Prof. Roddy is oblivious of the fact.

Furlow had over 100 signers petitioning the Court for a special election to change the polling place. At the election Steinmetz had 116 votes and Furlow 32. The writer first saw the light of day in this house, on a cold October morning, according to the diary of the late William J. Fraser, who repaired grandfather's clock at our house that day.

When Nathaniel Lightner vacated this hotel in 1805, John V. Smith took possession and conducted it for a period of four years, until 1809.

John Winters moved into it at this time, and remained until 1811. He was a noted and popular man and well spoken of years afterward.

The owner of the place, John Erb, died in 1810. His son, John, became the owner by inheritance. He took possession in 1811.

He named it "The Red Lion Hotel," and had a handsome sign with the picture of a lion swinging from a pole, erected in front of the building.

He was the father of the following children: The late Hiram Erb, of Clay; the late John B. Erb, of Lititz; the late Henry B. Erb, and the late

Mrs. George W. Steinmetz, both of Clay township.

He conducted the hotel for a period of forty years, with the exception of the year 1819, when Peter Weidner occupied it, and again from 1822 to 1825, when it was rented by William Strunk, Jacob Diffenderfer and Jacob Garber respectively for a period of one year each.

During part of the time of the first incumbency from 1811 to 1819 Mr. Erb also conducted a general store in the west end of the building, but this proved an unprofitable venture and he soon abandoned it.

During the time he had rented the hotel to the parties above named, he lived in the "Corner House," already mentioned, and devoted his time to operating the mill, close by, which he had purchased from his brother, Isaac.

When he returned to the hotel in 1825 his son, Hiram, was placed in the mill at the age of fifteen, and practically remained there until 1869, having purchased it from his father, Joseph R. Royer, now residing at Lexington, operated the mill one year.

Hiram Erb sold the mill in 1870 to Michael S. Eberly, who, with his son, Lewis G., yet resides thereon. Mr. Eberly enlarged and remodeled it in 1875. The roller process is now installed. An older mill existed and was converted into a school-house, used from 1787 to 1800. John Erb, another son, and a hired man, John Stober by name, had charge of the farm connected with the hotel.

When Mr. Erb first took possession of the hotel in 1811 it was located in Cocalico township; in 1812 the records speak of it as Warwick township.

However, in 1815, the boundary lines of Cocalico and Elizabeth townships were changed. Previous to that

year the present village of Clay separated the townships, or, rather, Middle creek was the dividing line. The village of Lincoln now became the eastern boundary of Elizabeth township, which desired more territory because a goodly portion of its former territory was now embraced in Lebanon county, organized in 1813.

This hotel was continued as the polling place of Elizabeth township and part of Warwick township added to it, which was detached in 1843 and added to Lititz.

Elizabeth township was given two polling places from 1852 to 1854 by establishing a new one at Pennville, which was abolished that year and partnership dissolved by erecting two townships, Clay and Elizabeth.

Application was made to the Quarter Sessions Court in November, 1853, for the erection of this new township. Emanuel Sheaffer, Morris Hoops and William Carpenter, Esq., were appointed commissioners to take testimony. They met at the Brickerville Hotel. Samuel Nissley, a Justice of the Peace, made the survey whereby Elizabeth township would retain 10,216 acres and the new township would obtain 13,648 acres. The commissioners decided to grant the erection of the township as surveyed, and call it "Middle Creek township." They made their report at the January Quarter Sessions of 1854. It was not absolutely confirmed until the April term of Court. In the meantime, a petition was circulated in the new township protesting against calling it Middle Creek township.

Jonas Lauber, who was a life-long resident and an influential citizen in Whig politics, consulted the father of the writer, who suggested to Mr. Lauber to write a personal letter to Judge

Henry G. Long, protesting against the proposed name, and suggest the name of Clay township.

Accordingly, Mr. Lauber wrote the letter to Judge Long, objecting to the name Middle Creek township, for the following reasons: "It is a long name, hard to spell (and purposely spelled it 'Middel Crick') and it is difficult to remember. Therefore, I suggest the name of 'Clay,' in honor of the great statesman."

According to the late Simon P. Eby, who was present in Court when this transaction took place, the letter of Jonas Lauber received more consideration than the petition. When Judge Long turned to his colleagues on the Bench and said: "If a citizen of the intelligence and education of Mr. Lauber does not know how to spell Middle Creek, we will not call the new township that way, but name it Clay, as he suggests—it meets all needs."

The records of the Quarter Sessions Court office will bear me out in regard to the petition and the letter.

Clay township retained the old polling place, but was called the Forty-fifth election district, which it bears to-day. Brickerville became the new polling place of Elizabeth township, and retained the former district number, which it holds to-day.

On May 12, 1854, special elections were held in the two townships to fill such vacancies that occurred by the division. In Clay township, H. S. Eberly acted as judge and Adam Oberlin and Martin Romig as inspectors. In Elizabeth township, the election board was David Carl, as Judge, and Moses Brubaker and Lewis R. Hibshman as inspectors. The Court appointed these officers, as the records show. The records also show that Elizabeth township had more offices to fill than Clay,

as the Clay end generally captured the big plums, having had both 'Squires.

Originally the western part of Lincoln, or New Ephrata as it was then called, was included in Clay township, but was detached by special survey in 1856 and added to Ephrata township.

The hotel at Clay, in Clay township, is a fertile field for the local historian. Many scenes and incidents connected with its history crowd upon our memory as related by some of the oldest inhabitants long since laid to rest.

There were many stirring scenes enacted on election days while the two townships were yet together; the employes of Elizabeth Furnace and Speedwell and Hopewell forges, which were then yet in operation, generally engaged in a free fight on these occasions, and many bloody conflicts took place.

On one occasion something out of the ordinary occurred when two men, who had been boon companions and joint participants in many a questionable adventure, fought a regular prize fight in the orchard close by. The men were Jacob Buffenmoyer and Joseph Weidman. Both carried the marks or scars of that conflict to their graves. The former was minus a finger and the latter had a piece of flesh taken from his cheek. He emigrated to Ohio some years later, and when he was East fifty years ago the writer saw him and noticed the scar.

Mr. Erb also devoted some time to politics, and in 1833 he was elected County Commissioner on the Anti-Masonic ticket and served with honor and distinction. Three years later he was a candidate for Sheriff, but was handicapped in this that his party ran two candidates, although at first

it was reported that he was elected. Election returns were not obtained so quickly and definitely as in our day.

Mr. Erb also made extensive improvements at the hotel and its surroundings. He tore down the old kitchen attachment and erected a larger and more commodious one, and erected a barn and what is now known as "The Old Shed," to the west of the hotel.

As this hotel was situated on the old Paxtang road, it was a great stopping place for the Conestoga wagons, and many a thrilling adventure took place in those times. The Paxtang road did not run as the Harrisburg and Downingtown turnpike now runs, but passed between the hotel and the "old shed," through the orchard to Lauber's corner. The custom of those days was for the horses to sleep close to the wagon and the men on the floor.

When this pike, or Horse Shoe pike, as it was then called, was built this hotel continued as a stopping place for the Conestoga wagons and the Irish drovers.

A memorable event took place in November, 1833, when the great shower of meteors visited this country. The hotel was crowded with teamsters and drovers and the yard with horses and cattle. Consternation reigned, the horses and cattle made unearthly yells, and strong men wept and prayed, drinking and carousing ceased and swearing was unknown. Everybody thought the end of the world was at hand. Eye witnesses related to the writer years ago about this memorable night and the magnificent and brilliant display of the skies on this night.

Upon one occasion a cavalcade of fifty men on horseback made their appearance at the "Red Lion" and

asked the genial landlord for supper, lodging and breakfast. Nothing daunted, it was granted. The fatted calf was killed, placed in the bake oven and roasted in bulk, and sufficient bread borrowed from the surrounding neighbors to feed the hungry crowd who slept on the soft side of a board at night and went away highly pleased the next morning.

To show how one incident shapes and determines the lives and destinies of men and women happened in this wise: On a pleasant autumn forenoon, in the year 1841, Mr. Erb was standing on the stone steps in front of his hotel, when a man neatly dressed came riding along on a splendidly-equipped horse of fine form. He halted, dismounted, entered the barroom and ordered dinner for himself and his horse. He announced that he was from Oley township, Berks county, and wanted to buy a farm in Lancaster county, having sold his farm at that point.

The genial manner and manly bearing of the man so pleased Mr. Erb that he sent for his son, Hiram, who had a farm for rent close by the one running along the race beyond Clay. The result was that the gentleman agreed to rent the farm and wait a year to buy a farm, subject to the approval of his wife.

Shortly afterward he and his wife appeared and rented the farm, and thus it happened that Samuel Meck, of Oley township, Berks county, moved on the farm of Mr. Erb's son, Hiram, in 1842. It took two days to get there. The teams, family, friends and cattle rested at Reading over night.

A finer four-horse team than the one owned by Mr. Samuel Meck never graced that section before or since, and when it reached the ears of the managers at Elizabeth Furnace, the day of arrival, they appear-

ed the next day to see the splendid stock. Another singular fact is, that from that day to August 19, 1912, some of the family of Samuel Meck or his descendants have been employed in the family of John Erb and his descendants, with possibly a year or two intermission.

John Erb retired from the hotel in 1851, and moved into a new brick house erected by him, where he died in 1862. Henry B. Erb, his youngest son, kept the hotel until 1854, when George W. Steinmetz, who was married to Priscilla Cecilia Erb, the only daughter of John Erb, moved on the farm and kept the hotel until in the fall of 1855, when the local prohibition law went into effect. He resided there in a private capacity until the spring of 1868, when he began business as a merchant in the new building erected by him, and continued until 1900. He also conducted a cigar factory from 1884 to 1900, and dealt in leaf tobacco from 1880 to 1900.

Mr. Steinmetz became the owner of the farm and hotel stand in 1862. Although it was a private house, the elections continued to be held here, and many humorous, pathetic and thrilling incidents occurred which space forbids to mention.

One of the surroundings of this hotel that deserves more than a passing notice is the well on the west side, between the hotel building and the "old shed." The pump stands on a rock, and on the one side is a large opening, hence the well is known as the "bottomless well," for when it was dug, while all hands had gone to dinner, the tools which had been left in it went to the bottom and were never recovered. The well, which had been perfectly dry, was filled with water. Whether the tools landed in China deponent saith not.

When the well on the east side.

between the hotel building and the barn, was dug in 1863 a large opening was found extending toward the dwelling that admits a man, and is of a considerable length.

When a heavy team passes rapidly through Clay, it often shakes the houses. Some advance the theory that Clay at one time in the history of the world was a lake, on account of the formation of the earth around it, which is peculiar, indeed.

In 1868 the building again became a public house, and was called "The Eagle Hotel."

Aaron B. Eitnier, now residing at Lincoln, occupied the building from 1868 to 1870. Emanuel Weidman, late of Brickerville, operated it from 1870 to 1876, during which time a cattle scales and a large new shed were erected. Daniel K. Witmyer, late of Lincoln, moved there in 1876, and remained until 1878, when Martin S. Gross, late of Ephrata borough, occupied it from 1878 to 1888, when John J. Faust, now residing at Allentown, lived there one year.

George W. Steinmetz resumed control of the hotel in 1889, and placed the late William K. Furlow in charge of it as manager, who continued in that capacity until the fall of 1890, when he resigned, and Lincoln M. Christ served in that capacity one month. He now resides at Hopeland, Clay township. When he resigned, Martin S. Gross, late of Ephrata borough, accepted the position and continued in it until April 1st, 1896.

In 1892, Mr. Steinmetz remodeled it by making the whole structure a three-story building and a better-equipped edifice.

He disposed of his interests in the property to Levi H. Miller, of Wilmington, Del. Both are now deceased.

But who was the real owner from April 1893, until the autumn of 1895, is hard to determine. It was in litigation during that period and changed hands frequently, sometimes daily, or even twice a day. Finally, it was sold at Sheriff's sale and bought by the late J. Wesley Supplee, of Philadelphia.

A. E. Lane, now residing at Clay, then became the owner by purchasing it from Mr. Supplee. This purchase included the farm and store building occupied by the writer as tenant, who continued as such until April 3, 1899.

John L. Coldren, now deceased, occupied the hotel two years.

In 1898, Isaac M. Christ, now residing at Ephrata, moved there and remained one year. He came from Hopeland, in Clay township, a thriving town, which Professor Roddy also fails to mention, calling it Newtown, which name it lost in 1897, when it became a postoffice.

John E. Wolf, also residing at Ephrata, went there in 1899, and left in 1901, and later was elected a Justice of the Peace in Clay township in 1905.

David H. Snyder, now conducting a hotel at Mechanicsburg, Upper Leacock township, conducted this hotel from 1901 to 1904.

William D. Wike had rented it in the spring of 1904, but died there in six weeks' time.

It was called "Wheelman's Rest" instead of the Eagle Hotel—now it goes by the name of the Clay Hotel.

Grant Steinmetz and his amiable wife are the genial hosts of the Clay Hotel since May 26, 1904, leaving their fine farm in Elizabeth township to a tenant, which they had operated for thirteen years. Both are descendants of Michael Shank, men-

tioned above as an early settler in this section.

Mr. Steinmetz also takes great delight in horses, and has some fine blooded stock. He inherits this trait from his father and grandfather. Three of his uncles had the same traits. In 1906 the bar-room was enlarged by throwing the two original rooms into one and otherwise improved it.

The blacksmith shop, erected in 1863, was demolished in 1912, and an up-to-date one built further up the road, operated by Adam Mellinger, who is the village blacksmith since 1893. Edwin H. Wealand is the saddler man since 1884. Hiram L. Erb had a general store from 1875 to 1900, when he died. His father was associated with him part of that time. Clay postoffice was established in 1873, the father of the writer was connected with it until March 31, 1900.

The writer was either postmaster or assistant postmaster from March 1, 1876, to April 15, 1899. A. E. Lane is the present incumbent. Harry L. Wealand is the genial 'Squire and teaches the Hopeland Secondary School.

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