

A Tombstone With A Story: A Revolutionary War Soldier

By W. M. Baillie

A single piece of rough slate can have quite a story to tell. Recently the Society received a call from a Columbia County farmer who spoke of an unrecorded tombstone on his farm. We went to visit the site on Katy's Church Road in Madison Township; the farm extends into Montour County and is within hailing distance of Lycoming County.

The tombstone is on a wooded hillside in a little-frequented area of Columbia County—across the road lies the edge of 4,338-acre State Game Lands. Near the gravesite are two springs, and the present owner speculated that a settler's cabin once stood nearby, though there is now no trace of a structure.

The stone is a flat slate, rough on the edges. It was crudely inscribed with the point of a knife or a nail:

PETER SORTOR
DE^c June 1 1837

The photo, taken in shadow, doesn't do justice to the inscriber; the inscription still is quite legible despite standing in the weather for 170 years. The inscriber was evidently an amateur, as shown both by the rough edges of the slate and by the crowding of the deceased's surname at the right edge of the stone.

The current landowner, himself a history buff, was curious about the deceased, of whom he knew nothing apart from the gravestone. Fortunately, an internet search turned up quite a bit of information about Peter Sortor. He was a veteran of the Revolutionary War, previously unrecorded in Columbia County.

Peter Sortor was born 15 April 1751 in Somerset County, New Jersey. He was the son of Hendrick Sortore (born c. 1721, died between 3 August 1793 and 5 May 1794) and Dinah Blew (c. 1717—c.1755), and grandson of Jacob Sortore (c. 1695—6 September 1751), all of Somerset County. Peter married around 1777 Esther Stout, daughter of Joseph Stout. In 1794 Peter inherited from his father the "house and land where he now lives" in Somerset County; within a few years, however, Peter sold that farm and moved to Pennsylvania.

During the Revolutionary War Peter served in the New Jersey militia. According to his later Pension Application, he served three separate terms. He first enlisted in the New Jersey Regiment on 7 June 1776 and served for six weeks with Capt. William Baird's company under Col. Quick. After a short break, he enlisted on 10 September 1776 at Fort Lee as a substitute for his brother Henry; this time he remained for 8½ months of a nine-month enlistment. He enlisted again on 1 July 1777 and served until sometime after June 1778. He was present at the skirmish of Millstone River (20 January 1777) and at the Battle of Monmouth (28 June 1778). When he applied for his pension on 8 November 1832 (National Archives #S23933), he was residing in Madison Township, Columbia County, PA.

On 13 July 1816 the Commonwealth granted to "Peter Sorter" a Patent for a tract of 100 acres 40 perches in then-Derry Township, Columbia County (Patent Book H-13-594). The tract had been surveyed on a warrant to brothers Gershom and Israel Biddle dated 4 January 1793; they later signed over their rights in the warrant to John Coxe, who on 10 April 1816 conveyed

his right to Peter Sorter. It is apparent from other records that Peter and his family had been living on or near this tract since about 1799. He also acquired an adjacent tract of 120 acres, but the records of that transaction have not been found.

On 17 March 1826, Peter sold both tracts, totaling 220 acres (plus the usual 6% allowance for roads) to Henry Crawford, mason, of Columbia County. Peter probably retained some rights in the homestead land, since he was buried there eleven years afterward.

Peter and his wife Esther Stout had six children—five girls and a boy—whose births are recorded in Somerset County between about 1778 and 1797. Curiously, no trace of these children seems to have survived in Columbia County, although presumably several or all of them came here with their father when they were aged from two to about twenty-one. Peter's wife Esther may have moved away from the county, but Peter himself was still a resident in 1816. Esther evidently died by 1826, since she was not mentioned in the deed of sale, as was normally required.

Columbia County, then, can claim one additional Revolutionary War soldier. A single gravestone, although isolated in a remote area, can tell us a lot about the early settlers in our region.

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An Old School House

By May McHenry

[The Works Progress Administration series of make-work programs during the Great Depression included the compiling of volumes in the American Guide Series, 1935-1941 by the Pennsylvania Writers Project. This project employed local amateur and professional historians to record aspects of local history around the Commonwealth. The projects included Job 166, A Picture of Columbia County 1940-1942, and among the essays in that collection is this charming recollection of the earliest school in upper Fishing Creek Valley. The author, May McHenry, listed among her sources an Old Note Book in her possession and an Old Spelling Book owned by A. B. McHenry. This essay is reprinted, lightly edited, from the original in the Pennsylvania State Archives (Harrisburg), Record Group 13; a few explanatory notes are added.]

The first school in the village of Stillwater, which was also the first school north of Knob Mountain in the long, lovely Fishing Creek Valley, was taught in the log cabin of the first settler of the region. It was in 1794 that a young man, Henry Heister, came to this part of the frontier of the Forks of the Susquehanna on business connected with a land grant. Being a "good young man with some book learning," he was persuaded to stay for three months to teach the many children of the few settlers. Other brief spells of schooling were given the pioneers' youngsters in other homes or out under trees whenever anyone who could and would impart rudiments of the "Three R's" came up the creek through the woods. About 1800 at least one term was taught in the weave shop of an eccentric, but literate, German who made his pupils carry water from a distant spring to wash his feet and their own at the end of each day's session.

Shortly after the turn of the century, probably in 1803, a log schoolhouse was built on the East side of Fishing Creek where the present Stillwater schoolhouse now stands. Land was donated as the site of a schoolhouse at that time and has been used for that purpose ever since.

That old log schoolhouse was put up in a three days' "Frolic" at which all the men and boys of the scattered settlement gathered together to build the fireplace, to bring in the logs and cut and square and place them and chink them up with clay. It was a joyous, hearty interval of work in common for the common good. The women and girls did their part in cooking food over open fires and in serving it under the big maple and buttonwood trees—corn bread baked in the coals, big iron kettles of fat, tender "saddle" venison, long-handled skillets of the delicious speckled trout from the nearby creek.

As was the custom at the old time "Frolics," the co-operatives worked hard and fast under a chosen leader and lightened their work with intervals of sport. The sturdy pioneers did not play croquet, lawn tennis or even baseball. They rested from their labors by wrestling, foot racing and "Jumping the Wand." Jumping the Wand, was a game copied from the Indians. The wand was a light, straight stick or pole placed, breast high, in the shallow crotches of two uprights. Tradition does not say whose breast, but the height to be jumped probably varied with the size and ambition of the contestant. Girls took part in these sports for it is set down in an old note book that Mary Ann jumped the wand "pretty as a dog chased doe."

When the building was finished everyone who had taken part in putting it up was expected to throw a stone over the roof for luck and to scare away trouble. That old custom may have been the origin of the game "Ante Over the Schoolhouse" played for over a hundred years by scholars at this school. The meaning and orthography of the name of the game is questionable. Each generation went ahead and played it lustily as their parents and grandparents had played, without caring whether it was "ante," "anti," or "aunty" they were sending over the schoolhouse.

It was a game that gave opportunity for argument, hence its long-continued popularity in a Scotch-Irish community. The players divided into equal teams, with or without leaders, by chance or choice, and lined up on the north and south sides of the schoolhouse. Someone on the side that had the first play would throw the ball of tightly wound homespun over the roof to the other side. The ball might land on the roof and roll down or a strong thrower might send it soaring and far back among the trees. If

the receiving side failed to make a catch one of their players went to the other side; if the ball was caught, the catcher was privileged to run around to his opponents and “sock” the player he wanted to come over and play on his side. The side with the most players in the end, won. Usually there was a “teller” who ran back and forth from side to side to tell that the ball had been actually and fairly caught, and by whom. Sometimes the schoolmaster served in this determinative capacity. Then the game was likely to be fair and peaceful and dull. A shrill-voiced girl could liven things up and be almost as vociferous and dramatic as a radio announcer of a Big League game.

A description of the log schoolhouse and of some of the happenings and experiences for which it formed the background has been handed down by one who received his early education in the old building and who at the age of seventeen took a turn at teaching therein. The one-room cabin was of good size and square, with the door facing the road and the creek, but with no windows on that side to permit the distraction of rare horsemen or ox-teams going by. The big fireplace faced the door, in each of the other two sides there were three windows. The windows were small and high up and they had in them glass brought up from Harrisburg by boat and ox cart. On one side of the door there was a slab shelf for the wooden water bucket and its gourd dipper that would throw today’s sanitation experts into fits; on the other side of the door there were rows of wooden pegs for hanging the caps, mufflers, and shawls of the scholars.

The seats were long slab benches. There were no desks in the center of the room. In fact, there were no desks at all; but along the two sides under the high windows were slab shelves with holes bored to hold the bottles of pokeberry ink. These shelves were fastened on a slant to be convenient for the practice of writing, and were of different heights to accommodate different sized scholars.

It may be interposed here that they were always scholars in those days, not students or pupils. As soon as a privileged child started in to learn his letters he was given the proud title of scholar, and his progress up the culture hill was watched and admired by a prideful family. Every night he had a chance to show off before an affectionately cheering home circle. The schooling of the children was a paramount anxiety as well as pleasure with the early settlers. Church and school presented the main social activities, and in this particular Scotch-Irish community the school preceded the church in that the schoolhouse was used for a time as a meeting place for worship.

The story of a joke handed down until it has acquired something of the aura of folklore features the slanted slab writing desk. One of the big boys, Peter Golder, in order to be near a girl he liked, squeezed in at the lower desk. Being a big boy and a fat boy, as Peter sprawled, elbows bent, nose close to paper, tongue twisting with each laborious pen stroke, a large and tempting portion of his body protruded into the room.

Without turning her head from her spelling book, demure Polly passed a pin to her brother, Daniel. With equal quiet suggestiveness Daniel passed the weapon to his brother, John, who held the strategic position.

An interested observer whose name is lost to fame, encouraged in a stage whisper – “Stick him hard!” – and John did. Big Peter roared and straightened spasmodically. As he leaped the long slab desk leaped with him. Ink bottles, copy books and leaning writers flew in all directions. It was a beautiful eruption, and a good time was had by all. To add to the poignancy of the enjoyment, Peter, John, Daniel and the unnamed whisperer all received sound thrashing. Eve-like suggester Polly escaped. She always protested she did not need a licking: she lost her pin.

In those early days school books were rare and treasured possessions. Beginners learned their ABC’s from letters printed on shingles with soft colored stones by the teacher or older scholars. A few copies of Webster’s Spelling Book, Testaments for readers, flat stones for slates served our great-grandfathers. Arithmetic was mostly mental arithmetic. The schoolmaster stood in the center of the room or paced back and forth as he kept strict watch over his flock and taught by the Socratic method. As the country opened up and the settlers prospered, the school equipment improved. They had paper copy books, goose quill pens and more books, especially more spelling books.

Spelling was the favored study in this school for a long time. The system of headmarks and the Friday afternoon “Spelling-Downs” introduced the spirit of competition that is the life of education as

well as of trade and politics. Some, even today have recollections of “figgiting” at the foot of the line in spelling class, waiting and hoping for those ahead to miss a word that would give a prepared speller a chance to prance proudly in front of them all to the head of the class. It did sometimes happen. But a good speller might stick at the top for a week; then he was automatically demoted to the foot of the class.

Parents and other visitors attended the Friday afternoon sessions. They were entertained by recitations of poetry pieces and by singing of hymns and old ballads; but the main event was the “Spelling-Down.” The class stood and each scholar in turn spelled words pronounced by the teacher until he or she misspelled and had to sit down. Spellers of such proficiency developed that sometimes the schoolmaster would have to turn to his linguistic ingenuity to find an honorificabilitudinatibusque* as a knockout to floor the champion. This inaccountable conglomeration of syllables is written in the back of one of the old spelling books and, according to the old folks, actually was used by old time schoolmasters to end too long drawn out spelling contests.

Community Spelling Bees brightened long winter nights. One school would challenge another school and go many miles over snow drifted, starlit roads with their best spellers to spell down or to be spelled down before enthusiastic audiences. Keen feeling and competition would be worked up and gay sled loads of parents and rooters would go along to encourage and cheer for the home team.

It must be admitted that the old time methods resulted in a generation that could spell. Also those who studied and frolicked in the little log schoolhouse learned to know and respect words and they used a richer, fuller vocabulary than the clipped “O.K.s,” “You bets,” “Sures” we hear today.

The early school teachers were men. The job included shoveling snow, splitting wood and licking the big boys. The teacher did not need to bother about tests for IQs (Intelligence Quotients) but it was necessary that he should be able to point a goosequill pen, walk miles through a blizzard, and down all the boys in a rough and tumble fight. Women did not qualify. In those days as soon as a girl could write her name and labor through a few verses of the Bible she passed on to an advanced course in Domestic Science under the efficient tutelage of a work-driven mother or mother-in-law.

The first schools were subscription schools; the teachers were paid by subscriptions and collected most of their wages in being “boarded around.” Unfortunately, many of the names of the able schoolmasters of over a century ago have been forgotten. It is known, however, that John Sutton, poet and preacher, as well as schoolmaster, was the last to teach in the old schoolhouse and the first teacher in the building that replaced it. And John Sutton is the hero of the “Smoking Out” legend.

The last day of school was a day of jubilation and boisterous celebration. It was the custom to lock the teacher out. When the schoolmaster arrived in the morning of the last day he would expect to find the schoolhouse locked against him and would be prepared to sing a song, deliver an oration or dance a jig as the price of admission. Upon one occasion the big boys, feeling their oats overmuch, decided that they would not open the door that was held by a stout wooden bar; they would add to the general gayety by keeping the teacher outside singing and dancing hour after hour, while they ran things inside to please themselves. They resisted appeals, commands, and threats, and had a high old time wrestling, clog dancing and calling out taunts.

Here was mutiny, a flouting of authority that could not be permitted. It was a raw cold day in early March, and the resisters inside made themselves comfortable with a fire of pine knots and corncobs in the big fireplace. In an adjacent field was a straw stack; the shut out master was a strong and agile young man. Before the rebels realized what was happening the schoolmaster was on the roof and the chimney was stopped up with wet straw. The insiders were smoked out and as they belched out of the door, choking and half blinded, the poet, preacher, schoolmaster was there to scatter them with a big stick.

In 1838 the newly founded Christian Church of Stillwater bought the materials of the old log schoolhouse and used it in building a house for their first pastor. The same year a new schoolhouse was put up, a frame building that, repaired and remodeled, is the old wing of the schoolhouse that stands at the end of the old covered bridge in Stillwater today.

150 Twenty-Dollar Gold Pieces: Buried Treasure In Bloomsburg

By André Dominguez

In 1938 the dwelling located at 141 Market Street in Bloomsburg was newly owned by Elmer R. Beers, proprietor of the E. R. Beers Electric Company and Treasurer of the Bloomsburg Water Company at the time. The house (see photo) was located across the alley from St. Matthew's Lutheran Church and beside the I.W. McKelvy general store on the north-east corner of Market Square that later become the Pursel Store. Mr. Beers lived there with his wife Margaret and two adult children, Ruth and Robert.

Mr. Beers had hired Harry Erwine to remodel the basement, a job which included excavating the dirt cellar in preparation for concreting. On the Friday morning of the 25th of February, 1938, John Johnson and George Hill, workers for Harry Erwine, were excavating the dirt floor. Johnson was digging and Hill was loading the dirt into a truck. At about ten o'clock, Johnson dug up something that looked like a tag on a plug of tobacco. Hill picked it up and discovered that it was a \$20 gold piece. When Johnson dug a little further, he uncovered more coins. In all the two men found 150 gold coins. They agreed not to say anything and put all the coins in Johnson's jacket. Hill left to unload the truck and when he returned, Johnson was showing the coins to the other employees. After Johnson had shown the coins, only a few minutes passed before every pick and shovel in the place was pressed into service. With the thought that there might be additional gold in the dirt, the excavation operations in that immediate section of the cellar were carried down about two feet. But no more gold coins were found. Johnson then took the coins to his car. Hill told Johnson that Erwine should be told, but Johnson said they should keep quiet.

At noon Johnson took the coins home, with the intention of placing them in the bank at the first opportunity. When he returned to work at 12:30 the contractor, Harry Erwine, was in the building and told Johnson that the coins were to be brought back. Johnson drove home and after arriving back at the building with fifty-four of the coins, met Mr. Beers. Johnson turned the fifty-four coins over to Beers. Beers then gave Johnson three of the coins, gave one to another laborer, Isaac Zimmerman, and five to Harry Erwine. Beers retained custody of the remaining forty-five gold coins.

The next day as Johnson was meeting with his attorney, Clarence E. Kreisher of Catawissa, Columbia County woke up to read the following headline on the front page of *The Morning Press*.

Over \$1,000 in Gold Pieces Is Dug Up in Cellar

Johnson deposited his gold coins in the First National Bank, Catawissa, and retained the three that Beers had given him. The total value of the 150 twenty dollar gold pieces was \$5,227.50 in 1938. This is the equivalent of \$77,600 in 2008.

No fewer than four front-page newspaper articles were written about the gold cache dug up by Johnson when he started legal action to recover the gold coins he had given to Beers. John

Johnson's attorney Clarence E. Kreisher immediately started action for the recovery of damages against Beers for the wrongful taking of personal property.

But soon the plot thickened. F. Harold Kline, son of the home's original owner, Frank P. Kline, heard of the find and directed his lawyers to seek recovery of the gold as the property of his father. He was fifty-five years old and an only child who worked as a laborer at the American Car and Foundry (AC&F) Company in Berwick. The court had assigned Kline administrator of his father's estate, since part of the estate was still unadministrated, and his mother, the original executor, had since died. Through his counsel, H. Mont. Smith and Hervey B. Smith, Kline sought recovery of all of the gold pieces as the property of his father. And just to make things more interesting, after it was revealed that Johnson did not turn over all the gold pieces to Beers, Johnson's co-worker George Hill claimed he was entitled to a share in the treasure. He retained Pottsville lawyers from the law firm of Hicks, Herzoz and Troutman.

Mr. Beers carefully investigated the claim of title and ownership of the coins. Because of the conflicting claims, Mr. Beers said that he had retained custody of the forty-five gold coins remaining in his hands and had deposited them in a deposit box in the Farmers National Bank to await final determination of ownership. He set forth that he stood ready and willing to deliver the coins to the custody and possession of the proper officers to await the final determination of ownership.

The Court of Common Pleas had a heavy case load at the time and it was not until later in 1938 that the case was heard. One can imagine that the summer of 1938 was alive with much speculation about who deserved all the gold coins in this found treasure. Should John Johnson get all the gold since he found it or F. Harold Kline because it was part of his father's estate? Or should Mr. Elmer Beers get the gold? After all, he bought the property with all its contents. And then there was George Hill, a co-discoverer, who claimed that he should get a portion of the treasure. All but Mr. Beers made a legal claim for the gold. Mr. Beers had filed a disclaimer to the gold coins because he did not want to go through the annoyance of litigation concerning property to which he felt he had no title. Finally on Wednesday, October 12, 1938, the case went to court and a jury of nine men and three women was selected for the gold coins trial.

Members of the jury trying the case were: Bernard I. Curan, retired, Centralia; Mrs. Sarah S. Hidley, housewife, Scott Township; Mrs. Beulah Harman, housewife, Berwick; Charles W. Heiss, laborer, Mifflin; Grover C. Hess, laborer, Orangeville; Glen Keller, truck driver, Benton; John Lynch, laborer, Conyngham; Bruce Moore, laborer, Briar Creek township; Mrs. Leah Patterson, housewife, Greenwood; Harvey I. Sult, laborer, Berwick; Frank St. Clair Sr., retired, Berwick, and Harlan L. Thomas, farmer, Fishing Creek.

During the case it was established that Frank P. Kline had committed suicide while waiting for the Bloomsburg & Sullivan train by Red Rock. Perhaps the most interesting testimony came from seventy-three year old William W. Barrett, Jr., a co-worker of Frank P. Kline. The following comes from *The Morning Press* account of the trial:

Barrett was a native of Montour township but had resided in Bloomsburg most of his life. He started work in the I.W. McKelvy store in 1882 as a boy of seventeen. Prior to that he ran errands at the store. He said the business was operated as a company store for the iron furnace and recalled that Johnny Sterner was the contractor erecting the house in which the money was found and that Frank P. Kline was the first occupant. Barrett said he looked after the warehouse at the store and that Kline's office was near. Barrett had the outside key and Kline the inside one, he related.

Barrett testified that he had known Frank P. Kline more than twenty years, and for eight years was a fellow employee at the I.W. McKelvy store in town. He said that Kline neither smoked nor drank and was a neat dresser and punctual in his work. Barrett told of Kline's connection with Joseph Weaver of Bloomsburg and Charles Nelson of Nanticoke in the operation of sixteen canal boats. During the winter seasons some of the mules used on the canal were kept at Kline's barn in Greenwood. Barrett also remembered Kline getting checks for his interest in the boat line on the old canal and said Kline frequently secured gold when he received the checks. Kline had once remarked to Barrett "that is the type of money you ought to save. It won't burn nor rust" and added "you often get a premium on a gold piece." Barrett said it was a hobby with Kline to get the gold in twenty dollar pieces and that Kline once told him "it is easier to count" when in that size. Kline said he "was afraid of the banks." Barrett testified and once remarked "you can keep it yourself easier than the bank can keep it." The gold was kept in a compartment in the McKelvy vault, Barrett said, and within a week prior to Kline's death the witness said he saw him put gold in a sack and place it in the vault. On the day of Kline's death, Barrett said he saw Kline take something from the vault. He said prior to that time Kline had not been mentally well. He [Kline] would wander away, Barrett continued, and [Barrett] had been ordered by I.W. McKelvy to follow Kline. At times Kline would go to the Rosemont cemetery and upon one occasion to the Normal School and then return. Once Barrett asked if Kline felt well and was told by Kline that "I don't feel as well as I ought to." Barrett said the illness was for about two months but that during that time Kline kept the books correctly. Following Kline's death he said that I.W. McKelvy telephoned for Mord. Drinker, a locksmith, to open the compartment in the vault. No gold was found there.

It was also established that on the morning of September 2, 1890, Frank P. Kline walked out the alley, up Market and out First to the rocks. [The "rocks" referred to are the rocks of the cliff behind the Crag Mansion on First Street. Mr. Kline had walked to the Red Rock Bridge, also called the Fernville Bridge, at Railroad Street.] Near the rocks he inquired of William Lord if the 9 o'clock train had gone up and was answered in the affirmative. In retrospect it was clear that Mr. Kline intended to throw himself in front of that train but arrived too late. Not to be outdone, however, he coolly walked down to the creek for awhile, then back up the rocks and sat down under a tree and waited for nearly three hours. When the train arrived, he threw himself in front of the passenger train, leaving the train to run him over. The fireman, William Geese, being on the side next to the rocks said he saw a man standing there, and when the engine gave a slight lurch he felt that they had run over some one and so informed the engineer Philip Sidler who immediately stopped the train. The body was removed to the undertaking establishment of

Baker and McBride where it was shortly afterward identified as that of Franklin P. Kline, and after proper preparation was taken home in the evening. A Coroner's jury consisting of Justice of the Peace Guy Jacoby, acting as Coroner, and J.C. Brown, Joseph Sharpless, T.C. Harter, G.W. Sterner, W.A. Hartzel and G.G. Baker was quickly convened. After taking testimony from Mrs. Daniel and Mrs. Alexander Stiner, who were the only adult witnesses of the movements of Kline, the jury exonerated the railroad company from any blame.

The testimony for the plaintiff, F. Harold Kline, was concluded Saturday morning. With all the testimony and evidence submitted, the attorneys made their final arguments to the jury who adjourned to determine a verdict. The jury started their deliberations at 5:30 o'clock in the evening, Saturday, October 15, and concluded with a sealed verdict at 2:30 o'clock Sunday afternoon, the next day. Finally the sealed verdict was reported around 9:20 o'clock on Monday, October 17. The jury had taken forty ballots before reaching its decision and at one time had stood eleven to one in favor of making the award to the finders, John Johnson and George Hill. But in the end the verdict gave the twenty dollar gold pieces to Kline's surviving son, F. Harold Kline. A defense motion for a new trial was presented the same day.

Five months would pass before Judge Herring rendered his decision on the motion for a new trial. On March 29, 1939, after reviewing eleven reasons presented for a re-trial, the court handed down an opinion in which Judge Herring refused a new trial to John Johnson and George Hill. Judge Herring stated that although there was no direct evidence as to the ownership of these gold coins (no one saw Frank P. Kline bury the gold) there was sufficient evidence that Frank P. Kline was the owner the gold coins. Shortly afterward one of the defense counsel said an appeal would be taken to an Appellate Court. The appeal was not entered, however, and the time for making the appeal expired. On April 25, 1939, more than a year after the gold coins were discovered, Judge Herring made an order directing that the gold be turned over to counsel for F. Harold Kline.

Postscript

For brief profiles of the main characters—F. Harold Kline, John Johnson, George Hill and E. R. Beer—see the expanded version of this article on the Society's website (click on **Additional Resources**, then on **Historical Essays**, then scroll down to this title).

For the website version:

Postscript

Below are brief profiles of the main characters:

F. Harold Kline – (son of the man who buried the gold)

Frank Harold Kline and his wife Elizabeth, who lived in Bloomsburg when the gold coins were discovered, sold their Brugler Avenue property and moved to a duplex at 209 E. 2nd Street,

Berwick, where he remained until at least 1949. The duplex that was Frank's new home was a large, two-story, brick dwelling, much larger than the Brugler Avenue house in Bloomsburg. His new house was also located approximately six blocks from the AC&F in Berwick, where Frank continued to work until he retired the summer of 1949. Frank Harold Kline also operated a movie show in Bloomsburg in the building occupied by the Wise Jewelry store at 116 W. Main Street. Frank also operated a cigar store at the location of the Jones' tobacco shop at 42 W. Main Street.

Frank Harold Kline was found dead in his apartment home at 209 E. 2nd Street, Berwick, on 26 November 1950. He was sixty-six years old and lying in a hall between the bathroom and kitchen with his left wrist slashed with a razor blade. His wife had been a Danville Hospital patient for some time. Ill health was attributed as the motive for Frank's suicide. Frank's wife, Elizabeth, died five years later in the Danville Hospital on 3 March 1956 at the age of seventy. Frank Harold Kline and his wife Elizabeth were buried in the Old Rosemont Cemetery, in the same plot as Frank's father.

John Johnson – (laborer who dug up the gold coins)

John married Emma Jean "Emogene" "Lurabell" Vietz on March 12, 1938. This was the same month he had declared that if he got all the gold he intended to marry a young woman from Elk Grove and build a home. After the money was given to F. Harold Kline, he and Emma Jean settled in a house on Old Mill Road in Hemlock Township. The house still stands and is immediately north of Larry's Lumber. Later John worked for the WPA and at the AC&F (American Car & Foundry) in Berwick. After these short jobs, John started to work at the Magee Carpet Company in Bloomsburg where he worked for 25 years, retiring in 1973. John and Emma Jean raised a family of four children. According to his brother, Marshall Johnson, and Marshall's wife, Sharlet, John loved coon hunting and would go out for days with his hounds. After he retired, John's interest turned to raising goats, which he did at the rear of his property. John lived until 1998 when he died on February 16 in the Bloomsburg Health Care Center on First Street. John is buried in Lime Ridge, Columbia County, Pennsylvania, in the Elan Memorial Park.

George Hill – (Co-worker of John Johnson)

At the time the gold coins were discovered in February of 1938, George lived on West Street, Bloomsburg. Later that year, George and Ruth lived at 345 E. 8th Street, Bloomsburg, and their only child, Ned L. Hill, was born in November of that year. After the gold coins trial had concluded, George continued to live in the Bloomsburg area and to work for H.R. Erwine as a laborer and truck driver. Around 1950, George moved his family to 2468 Third Street, in Espy. He was last employed by the H.R. Erwine Lumber Company where he had worked for most of his career. George died in the Klingerman Nursing Home, Orangeville, on 4 November 1994 and was buried in the Bethel Hill Cemetery, Luzerne County.

E. R. Beers – (owner of the property where the gold coins were found)

Elmer Rutherford Beers was born on May 19, 1884 in Weatherly, Carbon County. He was later a resident of Shenandoah, Schuylkill County and finally came to Bloomsburg, where in 1918 he established the E. R. Beers Electric Company. Elmer married Margaret around 1911 and they raise a family of two children, E. Ruth Miller and Robert G. Beers.

In addition to his business, he was a long time treasurer and director of the Bloomsburg Water Company, a long time director of the Farmers National Bank and the first president of the Bloomsburg Kiwanis Club. Beers also served as mayor, then called the president of council, of Bloomsburg, 1942-46. He also was very active in other civic activities.

Elmer R. Beers died on May 28, 1967 in the Friends Hospital, Philadelphia, where he had been hospitalized a number of weeks. He was buried in the New Rosemont Cemetery.

SOURCES:

Most of the information for this article came from many articles found in *The Morning Press*. Additional information was found in Columbia County Court records and Census data.

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Bloomsburg's Grand Opera House

By W. M. Baillie

A recent accession to the Society's collections is a playbill (pages 1 and 4 shown below) for a week of dramatic presentations in Bloomsburg in 1912. It has a lot to tell us about local entertainment options in the days before radio or TV, when movies had not yet driven out of business the old tradition of live performances in small towns.

The little four-page handout also piqued my curiosity about the former Grand Opera House in Bloomsburg. The three-story brick building on Center Street is now the home of the widely-famed Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble. But what was its original usage? More of that in a moment.

Myrkle-Harding Stock Company

The playbill touts the visit to Bloomsburg of the Myrkle-Harding theatrical troupe in January, 1912. This traveling company toured American towns and cities annually for over a quarter century beginning about 1898. At each week-long stop, the hard-working company presented two performances a day for six days. On Sunday, their "day of rest," the company would pack up and travel by train to their next tour stop.

In September 1910 the company played a week in Bloomsburg's Opera House, as we learn from another playbill in the Society's collections. Featured among "COMING ATTRACTIONS" to the Opera House, the Myrkle-Harding Stock Company promised to bring to the theater 20 people and a railroad car load of scenery; the group also featured "High Class Vaudeville between acts."

In that respect the troupe was typical of the era: there were many traveling entertainment companies which presented dramas—mostly melodramas—along with vaudeville acts, circus acts, musical numbers and minstrel shows. They were "on the road" for much of the year. The typical melodrama plot is suggested by the 1908 production of "Married for Money, or The Old Wife and the New." A *Morning Press* synopsis told readers that the play is

one of absorbing heart interest and the presenting cast, one of unusual excellence. The story deals with the life of a millionaire Iron magnate, who upon reaching a position of power and affluence, casts off the wife of his youth and early struggles, and takes on a younger and more beautiful one, who marries him for his great wealth and position. His sudden fall from power and wealth and his subsequent salvation by his forsaken wife, form the basis of a story that is said to be one of the most powerful sermons in favor of the preservation of the sanctity of the home, and the sacredness of the marriage vow, ever written.

The Myrkle-Harding company was led by Emma Myrkle, whose "strong single specialty" was the role of comic *soubrette* (a coquettish and frivolous young woman). Her partner, Will H. Harding, starred as the romantic hero. Ms. Myrkle was also a featured dancer; a signed glossy photo at the New York Public Library shows her dancing in Roma costume with a tambourine. Harding wrote a two-person comic sketch for the pair, titled "The Ballet Girl and the Bill-Poster."

The Myrkle-Harding company traveled extensively. Newspaper notices of their engagements, selected almost at random, list them in Middleboro, MA in January 1908; at Halifax, Nova Scotia in May 1906, April 1910 and March 1912; in Dover, NJ, January 1914; at Oswego, NY 1915 and 1919; and at Easton, PA in November 1924.

For their 1912 tour, the company advertised seven plays in their repertory, all of which had played on Broadway; many of these were based on popular romantic novels. The headline play was “The Barrier,” derived from the best-selling novel of that same title (1908) by Rex Beach. Other repertory plays included “Brewster’s Millions,” “A Bachelor’s Romance,” and “The Burglar and the Lady.”

The Society’s newly-acquired 1912 playbill lists (inside) nine males and no fewer than twenty-five females in the Myrkle-Harding troupe. Probably, however, many of these “actors” are simply double stage names for individuals; most likely, the total company including stage hands was about 20 persons.

The Grand Opera House

Bloomsburg’s Grand Opera House probably never staged a “grand opera.” Instead, it was intended to provide popular entertainment, and that function has continued at the same location for several generations. Built in 1874 by Benjamin H. Vannatta and Edward Rawlings, the Opera House was the first structure in the town dedicated to live performances; earlier, plays and concerts had been given on the upper floors of various store or lodge buildings. The new auditorium, with about 400 seats, offered a curtained stage—also a first in the town. The few interior photos which survive show that the interior was richly decorated in elaborate Rococo sculpture (in plaster, almost certainly) and that the stage scenery was large and fancy.

The 1910-1911 seasonal program includes “Official Information” and “Theatre Rules” which suggest how different was the atmosphere during performances in comparison to today’s BTE audiences. Among the items:

- Any persons found spitting on the floor, walls, or whistling, hissing, stamping feet, etc., will be ejected from the Theatre.
- If you eat peanuts, eat shells as well.
- Ladies are requested and obliged to remove their hats in accordance with an Act of the Legislature. [This was the era of gigantic hats adorned with ostrich plumes.]
- We [the management] earnestly solicit home-talent entertainments, either from churches or secret organizations [to fill the theater and provide rental between out-of-town troupes].

Already in 1910 the Opera House was touting its usual Saturday Evening “Picture Show” of “4000 feet of Motion Pictures.” Admission was just 5¢ (as contrasted to 25 to 50 cents for live professional productions). At the time, there were several other motion-picture houses in Town, most of them small storefront operations such as the Bijou on West Main Street and the Lyric at 5 East Main. Soon to be opened also were the Arcade in a former furniture store (near the 1950s Moose Lodge), the Starr in a back alley, and the grand Victoria seating 1200 (the later Capitol, its marquee still prominent on Main Street).

At various times, lots of towns in and near Columbia County had an Opera House; the one still surviving by that name in Catawissa is now the best known, but among other towns with an Opera House were Benton, Berwick, Iola, Millville, and Ringtown. All of them presented local talent, touring entertainers, the occasional boxing match and, after 1900, increasingly popular moving pictures.

Bloomsburg's Opera House was valued as a community resource. The hall was hired for amateur theatricals, concerts, political rallies, etc. In 1890 a Democratic rally there produced a near-riot when a guest speaker announced proudly that he had been a soldier in the Union troop sent to Columbia County during the Civil War to quell the so-called Fishingcreek Confederacy. Not to be outdone, the next year the Republicans rented the Opera House to present a series of tableaux from Gen. Lew Wallace's popular novel *Ben Hur*. The Bloomsburg Orchestra gave a concert there in 1893 and Bloomsburg High School's first commencement was held in the building in 1892.

In its long run as Bloomsburg's premier entertainment center, the Opera House has had many owners and some rough times. Local industrialist I. W. McKelvy, who bought the building in 1876 from its original owners, ran the house successfully for twenty years but then fell into bankruptcy and gave up the building to his creditors along with all his other properties. Dr. J. S. John, who came into a half-interest through his wife's inheritance, bought the other half-ownership, enlarged the stage and built a gallery, and changed the name to Columbia Theatre (but the old name of "Bloomsburg Opera House" continued current for decades).

In 1940, with vaudeville and small-town live theater all but dead, the building was refashioned as a movie palace and renamed the New Columbia. It was decorated in the then-popular Art Deco style. The building continued as a movie house into the 1970s, though increasingly shabby and unfrequented, and finally closed for good.

In 1980, however, the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble bought the premises, raised money to gut it and rebuild it, and opened it as their new home in 1983. They retained some of the Art Deco fixtures of the building and reinstalled these to highlight the building's history. The Ensemble happily has celebrated its 25th year at what it has renamed the **Alvina Krause Theatre** in honor of BTE's founding mentor.

The Bloomsburg Opera House building, then, has returned to its original primary function of presenting live drama to regional audiences. It has been a focal point of theatrical experience in the region for 135 years.

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The Centennial of the Columbia County Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument

Robert Dunkelberger

November 19, 2008 marked the centennial of the dedication ceremony for the Civil War monument on Market Square in Bloomsburg, erected to commemorate the veterans of Columbia County who fought in that terrible conflict. Its dedication also ended a very long process to obtain permission to erect the monument and especially to decide its location—not unlike the current controversy in Bloomsburg over the location and design of the proposed veterans' memorial. What follows is the brief story of the efforts to build the Civil War monument and the story of the son of a prominent Bloomsburg family who wrote a poem 100 years ago about those efforts.

As early as the 1870s there was a movement in Columbia County to erect a monument in honor of the men who had fought for the Union during the Civil War, but it was not until February, 1898 that a petition was first presented to the court asking that a monument be erected. For nearly a decade efforts continued in order to obtain final approval and the authorization of funds, and most contentiously decide exactly where the monument should be located. Although disagreements still continued about the location, in 1907 two successive grand juries finally approved the petition as was required by law; in February of 1908 the design of the monument by Worden Brothers of Batavia, NY was approved by the County Commissioners, and J. U. Kurtz of Berwick won the right to erect it with a bid of just under \$7800.

With Market Square at last decided upon as the site, and after delays in getting the carved granite from quarries in Vermont, the monument went up in October and was dedicated in a grand ceremony on November 19, 1908. Following a large parade that began at Town Hall and wound through the town's streets, a crowd of thousands filled Market Square to hear a number of speakers, led by President Judge Charles C. Evans and Congressman John G. McHenry, and music supplied by five brass bands.

To commemorate all of the trials and tribulations the monument proponents endured, George Edward Elwell, Jr. wrote the poem that follows (page 4) in the summer between his junior and senior years at Trinity College. Elwell was the grandson of William Elwell, President Judge in Columbia County from 1862 to 1888, and son of George Elwell, a lawyer and longtime newspaper publisher. He was born in Bloomsburg on April 19, 1886, graduated from the Bloomsburg State Normal School in 1905, and four years later completed studies at Trinity College in Connecticut with a B.A. degree.

Upon returning to Bloomsburg Elwell assisted his father in the family commercial printing business first established in 1837, renamed George E. Elwell & Son. This included the final year of *The Columbian* newspaper which ceased publication in 1910, ending 35 years under the Elwell family. Elwell continued with the business until it was sold in 1950. In addition to publishing, among his many other pursuits were teaching French at the normal school from 1914 to 1920, serving on both the Town Council and Bloomsburg school board, being chairman of the local George Washington Bicentennial Commission, and participating as an active Freemason.

In recognition of the service to the normal school by his father (an 1867 graduate of the Bloomsburg Literary Institute, normal school instructor from 1872 to 1873, and later member of

the Board of Trustees) and grandfather (longtime member and President of the Board of Trustees), and with Elwell himself being an alumnus and former instructor, Bloomsburg State College decided to name one of their dormitories after the Elwell family, the only dormitory on the lower campus not named for a Pennsylvania county. On April 26, 1969 Elwell attended the Alumni Day ceremony dedicating the recently completed Elwell Hall. It proved to be his last public appearance, however, and less than one month later on May 20 he was dead at the age of 83.

Here is the poem by George Edward Elwell, Jr. entitled *The Monument*, which was published in *The Columbian* on July 23, 1908. (Note that the poet's prediction of dedication of the monument by September was a little too optimistic; the actual date was November.)

The Monument

Some forty weary years ago we had a Civil War.
To do the well-earned honors to the fighters, we deplore
That we have waited all this time to make arrangements for
A monument.

The scheme was talked of many years by citizens and press,
But did not gain much headway, and it seemed to retrogress,
For some who held the pocket book seemed anxious to suppress
That monument.

The years kept rolling quickly past, and we with fear were filled,
Because, if proper sentiment were not in them instilled
The people of our County would at last decide to build
No monument.

They realized the fitness of the plan, and soon were moved
To sanction it, and patriotic sentiment improved.
They saw that loyal citizens quite properly behoved
A monument.

At last Grand Juries twice approved – the Court approved it, too.
The G.A.R. encouraged all the subject to renew
Until the minds of all of us had only this in view –
The monument.

Appropriations then were made, and soon began the race
Among contractors; then arose a problem hard to face.
'Twas this – Although we've ordered it, we don't know where to place
The monument.

Quite varied were the spots proposed in ev'ry part of town.
Whatever one suggested new made all the others frown,
And for awhile it looked as though 't would turn things upside down –
That monument.

Said some, "Let's dig the fountain up. It's really in the way.

What's all this long debate about, and consequent delay,
For Market Square is just the place to properly display
The monument."

Said others, "Tear the Normal down and set the shaft up there.
The Hill will make it prominent and raise it high in air."
(Now all this time the builder's men were hustling to prepare
The monument.)

"Let's stand it on the River Hill – that's just the place," some thought.
While recognition for the schemes of many more were sought.
It looked as though to satisfy them all there must be bought
Ten monuments.

An end of this was brought at last, and all the schemes were wrecked,
For wiser judgment saw that Fate with steady finger becked
To Market Square, the proper place in Bloomsburg to erect
The monument.

And now the work has been begun; a firm foundation's laid.
Committees to collect a fund have worked and not delayed.
We'll dedicate in fitting style (if cash enough is paid)
The monument.

In mem'ry of the valiant deeds of those who fought and died
To save the honor of the land and stem rebellion's tide,
We'll, in September next, unveil, with patriotic pride,
Our monument.

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The Nescopeck Path

Andre Dominguez

Many of the early settlers of the Berwick and Bloomsburg areas of Columbia County came from the region of Northampton County along the Delaware River. What was the path they followed through the woods across the mountains? The first clue comes from an old Columbia County history book:

In 1787, Evan Owen, the founder of Berwick, was commissioned to superintend the construction of a road by the State from Easton to the Nescopeck falls [on the Susquehanna River between Berwick and Nescopeck]. Two years later the Indian trail which was part of the route was improved sufficiently to permit the passage of wheeled vehicles. On March 19, 1804, the Susquehanna & Lehigh Turnpike & Road Company was incorporated, and in the following year graded and completed the road at an enormous expense for those times.¹

At first glance it might seem that Evan Owen was constructing a road from Easton to Nescopeck. This is not true since a road was already well established from Easton to Bethlehem and from Bethlehem to Fort Allen at Gnadenhütten on the Lehigh River. Evidence of the actual extent of Evan Owen's road construction effort can be found in a letter reprinted in the *Pennsylvania Archives*, Series 1. In a 1789 letter to Even [sic] Owen from Executive Council Secretary Charles Biddle, Owen is requested to produce accounts accompanied with their proper vouchers for settlement connected with the opening of a road between the Susquehanna River, at the Falls of Nescopeck, and the Lehigh River.² The total length of the Nescopeck Road was approximately 34 miles.

Another interesting fact is that Evan Owen ran out of money for the Nescopeck Road project and the construction was not one hundred percent completed in 1789. In a letter to Governor Mifflin, later directed to the President and Supreme Executive Council of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on December 6, 1789, Owen announces that he has opened the Nescopeck road so that it may be travelled by wagons, etc., except the digging away of a part of Spring Mountain, and that there yet remains about three miles unopened of the said road. Owen continues that he has expended the whole amount "of your Orders" and requests that monies be appropriated by Act of Assembly to open the Nescopeck road.³

The course of the Nescopeck Path was identified in a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission magazine (see Illus. 1).⁴ The Nescopeck Path originally connected Nescopeck to Bethlehem, but as mentioned the improved road from Bethlehem to Fort Allen had already been established; Evan Owen improved the section between Fort Allen and Berwick. From this map, the sections of the path from Easton to Nescopeck can be identified as follows.

1. Starting at Lechauwekink (Easton), also known as The Delaware Fork.
2. The Path runs southwest to Bethlehem. This is current PA Route 22.
3. From Bethlehem the Path runs northwest to Fort Allen, located at Gnadenhütten (Weissport), a Moravian settlement. Fort Allen lies along the Blue Mountain (Kittatinny) range on the Lehigh River, ten miles above Lehigh Gap.⁵ Based on the path on the map it is not clear what current highway route follows the Path from Bethlehem, but it appears that PA Route 248 parallels the Path to Weissport. The improved road from Easton to Bethlehem to Fort Allen is shown clearly on a 1770 Pennsylvania map (see Illus. 2). Note that the watercourse identified on the map as the West Branch of the Delaware River is the Lehigh River.⁶

4. Across the Lehigh River at Fort Allen to the continuation of the Nescopeck Path.
5. On the other side of the Lehigh River, current PA Route 248 merges with PA Route 93 and continues to Nescopeck and the Nescopeck Falls on the Susquehanna River.

A sketch map of the proposed road was submitted by Owen on 5 June 1787 and can be found at the Pennsylvania State Archives.⁷ This map identifies the following route, creek crossings and landmarks.

1. Starting at the Lehigh River
2. Quahe Ake Creek (now Quakake Creek, near Hodsondale, Carbon County)
3. Beaver Pond Creek (now Beaver Meadows, Carbon County)
4. Big Black Creek (near West Hazelton, Luzerne County)
5. Little Black Creek
6. Little Nescopeck (near Sybertsville, Luzerne County)
7. John Balliets house (near Sybertsville, Luzerne County)
8. Nescopeck Creek
9. Susquehanna River, falls

NOTES

1. *Historical and Biographical Annals of Columbia and Montour Counties Pennsylvania* (Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1915), p. 35.
2. *Pennsylvania Archives*, series 1, vol. 11, Instructions To Evan Owen – Nescopeck [sic] Road, 1789, p. 585.
3. Letter to Pres. Mifflin from Evan Owen, 1789, *Pennsylvania Archives*, series 1, vol. 11, pp. 643-4.
4. Paul A.W. Wallace, “Historic Indian Paths of Pennsylvania,” reprinted from *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, Quarterly Journal of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, Vol. 76, No. 4, October, 1952, for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.
5. Thomas Lynch Montgomery, editor, *Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania*, second edition (Harrisburg: Wm. Stanley Ray, State Printer, 1919), p. 184.
6. *A Map of Pennsylvania, laid down from actual surveys and chiefly from the late Map of W. Scull*, published in 1770.
7. *Draught of a Road from Union Saw Mill on Lehigh River to falls Nescopeck on Susquehanna*, Testified by Owen on 5 June 1781; Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Record Group 12, State Roads & Turnpike Maps (1706-1873), 12.9.

Editor's Note: *A diehard genealogy researcher will tell you that one should always start with family traditions but that these have to be verified in every detail. The following article about the dogged quest for one man's family illustrates this truism clearly.*

Clayton and Lottie's Story

Dani Crossley

According to family lore, Clayton died in a construction accident and his wife Lottie died in childbirth about 1921. How very sad for the three little children left behind. I listened closely as Clayton's grandson Bill Hughes filled in the few details he knew. Bill's father, Harold Clayton Hughes, was probably less than 2 years old at the time of the tragedy according to the date on the birth certificate from which Bill read. Harold was the third of three children born to Clayton A. and Lottie Dye Fluker. All Bill could add was that his father Harold was put in the abusive care of foster parents Mr. and Mrs. Hughes near Pittsburgh. He ran away during high school and lived above a store. Anger and bitterness about his childhood kept him from talking about it. He died near his son Bud in Texas in 1985.

Now his other son, Bill, after many unsuccessful attempts to discover the truth himself over the past ten years had contacted me to try to find anything I could about Clayton and if at all possible, locate any of his father's living relatives. Since Bill's mother, Avis Hilliard Hughes, was an only child, Bill and his brothers had never known any aunts, uncles or cousins. The words "family reunion" had no meaning. I told Bill I was used to looking for dead people, but I'd certainly give it a try.

A daunting task with so much at stake. According to census records, the little family of five Flukers was intact in 1920 in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Clayton was working in a shipyard – certainly a plausible setting for a construction accident. Harold's two sisters were Helen, born 1911 and Irene, born 1913. Fast forward to 1930: Helen and Irene are living with their maternal aunt, Dora, and her husband, Rev. Herman Pool in S. Dayton, Cattaraugus County, NY. Harold has already been placed with his foster parents. Wouldn't you know it – female siblings! How was I ever going to find them and any descendants not knowing their married names?

I hatched a plan for a road trip to Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties as part of a visit to our son who lives in Erie, PA. My husband could help them with household projects while I scouted out the courthouses in the county seats. I naively figured I could zip in, flip to the index in the marriage docket and quickly capture the names of the husbands of Harold's two sisters.

I started doing a little research online as to hours, directions and holdings for each courthouse. I know New York State zealously guards the privacy of its residents. Good thing I did! The marriage records are kept in the town where the marriage took place. Just grand. I had no idea if a marriage had even taken place, much less in which town within two likely counties it might have happened. Fortunately, to accompany this bizarre record-keeping scheme, a state-wide index of all marriages exists. BUT, it is only available in the main libraries in five cities: Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany and New York City. Luckily for me, my twin nephews live in Buffalo and they agreed to try to find the sisters' marriage records.

After a false start that had my nephew plodding through each individual marriage certificate, he laid his hands on the index and found what we were looking for: Irene Fluker, married May 1, 1937 in Clarence, NY. Oddly enough, the husband's name is not a part of this index. Only slightly fazed, plunged ahead and fearlessly roused the Clarence town historian. Her first question: "What is the husband's name?" Arrgh! Reining in my frustration, I asked if she would be able to find that out with the information I had given her. She said she probably could and I should call her back in an hour. The clock was racing as we were leaving to go to Erie in a little over that time. I had already listened to the

spiel about privacy and request forms and payment and signatures and “already dead.” It would be a miracle if I were able to obtain this name before setting out for southwestern New York.

I needed a backup plan. From scouring cemetery records posted online for Cattaraugus County, I had discovered that Dora Pool had died in that county in 1963. If she raised the two orphan girls, surely she would’ve remembered them in her will. “Hello, Cattaraugus County courthouse, would you be so kind as to check if you have the will for Mrs. Dora Pool?” “You do? Wonderful! I’ll be there on Friday.”

In the meanwhile, a follow-up call to Clarence, NY revealed that they did indeed have the marriage record. Could I prove that the woman was deceased? (How could I do that when I didn’t know her name, I thought.) I assured her I definitely could and she offered that she was fairly certain the husband was deceased as he was born in 1899. I said I could look it up if I had his name (expectant pause)? “Oh,” she said, “it’s William Newcomb.” Hallelujah! Irene’s married name!! Now, if she only had children...

Armed with Wanda (our snappy GPS system), an extensive to-do list and my bottle of diet soda, I was off bright and early Friday morning. The Little Valley courthouse was easy to find in the center of town and I helped them unlock the doors. Since I knew I wasn’t going to find any marriage records there, I concentrated on wills. While the kind assistant located Dora’s will for me, I searched the indexes for any other pertinent names. Voila! There was Willis G. Fluker, father of our hero, Clayton Fluker. What a find! I already knew that Willis Fluker had died in May of 1921 from falling off a hay bale. Since Clayton didn’t appear in the newspaper write-up about the tragic accident and death of Willis, that coincided with (and I thought pinned down) the story of Clayton’s early demise around 1921.

Things were falling into place, or so I thought. I was saving the juicy tidbit (Dora’s will) for last and quickly skimmed Willis Fluker’s will. Imagine my astonishment when he leaves his ADOPTED son Clayton a dollar. Whew! My neat little timeline is blown out of the water and this family history is murkier than ever. Clayton is still alive in 1921 and there’s obviously some bad blood here.

Before I leave Willis behind, jolt number two is delivered when I come to the realization that good ol’ Aunt Dora was Willis’ wife before she became Mrs. Herman Pool. Dora Emma Dye, Lottie’s older sister, was married to Lottie’s husband’s adoptive father. I need an Excedrin... and a score card. I must leave those fascinating revelations and proceed with the people mentioned in Dora’s will.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, Dora! There among the antique desks and painted portraits were the names of Dora’s many heirs – siblings, nieces and nephews as she never had any children of her own. Jumping off the page immediately were the names of nieces Irene Newcomb and Helen McKeown and... sister Lottie Powers??!! What happened to dying in childbirth? When the will was written in the late 1940’s, Lottie was not only alive, but remarried. In the list of nieces and nephews, two unfamiliar names, Margaret Meade of East Aurora, NY (suburb of Buffalo) and Nancy Thurston of Michigan, appeared. From doing extensive research on the Dye family beforehand, I could identify the others in the list, but these two I didn’t know. Did Lottie have children from her second marriage? I couldn’t wait to find out.

Excited about all sorts of new nuggets on which to chew, I made quick work of my stop in Mayville, Chautauqua’s county seat and added nothing new to the file. The rest of Friday evening I used every shoehorn available to try to squeeze Margaret and Nancy into Lottie’s new family. Nothing fit. On a hunch, I searched current directories and found an 85-year-old Margaret Meade living in East Aurora. It had to be her.

Nine o’clock Saturday morning, the earliest I could bring myself to make the call, I contacted Margaret. When I explained that I was looking for relatives of Dora Pool, she replied, “You found her.” She was

very sympathetic to my quest, offering copies of Dye family pictures and whatever she could to help. Her father, Charles Dye, was Dora and Lottie's brother. I asked her if she knew Irene and Helen.

She had known them. Unfortunately, both were now deceased. Irene never had any children, but Helen had two daughters. In fact, Margaret had corresponded for a time with the one daughter and her name and address were somewhere on an old Christmas card list. With promises to send off copies of photos and look for Helen's daughter's information, she wished me good luck on my search.

I contacted Bill Hughes and told him I was making progress.

In Wednesday's mail after my Saturday morning chat with Margaret there arrived a note from her. It wasn't large enough to contain photos, so I was a little puzzled. When I opened it, she had written to let me know that Helen's daughter's name was Joan Van Dyke and she lived in Mt. Bethel, PA – not even two hours from me! At six that evening, I tracked her down via reverse address lookup and made the call. As soon as I told her who I was and why I was calling, she began crying and laughing all at once. She couldn't believe I was contacting her. Her mother and her aunt had looked their whole lives for their little brother Harold. They had even hired a private detective. Unfortunately, they had been searching for Harold Fluker and he had been given the name of his adoptive family, Harold Hughes. Joan and her husband, Chuck, were still grieving the loss of one of their beloved pets and she said my call was a blessing. When I asked if it was okay for me to pass along her name and phone number to Bill, she said she'd be waiting by her phone for his call.

I realized when I hurried to my computer that I didn't have an address or phone number for Bill. We had communicated solely by email. Since he was probably still at work on the west coast and he didn't always check email regularly, I didn't know when I'd hear from him. Five minutes after I clicked the 'Send' button, the phone rang and Bill was on the line. His excitement and eagerness for Joan's number cut our conversation short. In the emails I received from them later that evening, both claimed it would be a long time before they stopped bouncing on the ceiling.

I am so glad to have been a part of bringing this family together. It is sad that the three siblings had passed before the connection was made, but Joan is sure that they are all watching and glad that the reunion has finally happened. Ten years ago when the sisters were still living, it wouldn't have been possible because the online records that made it all come together weren't available then. Plans are in the works for an actual "family reunion" of the first cousins in Pennsylvania this summer.

Epilogue: Joan was the recipient of her Aunt Irene's treasure trove of family records. I spent an enjoyable and enlightening day in her lovely Mount Bethel home and pieced together some of the remaining pieces of the puzzle.

Through an Indenture Contract binding Clayton to his adoptive father Willis Fluker, we learn that Clayton's birth surname is Abbey – a family that arrived in the United States in the 1600's. Clayton's birth parents abandoned him at about three years of age. Through other photos and family notes, we discover that Clayton was actually the youngest of four Abbey siblings, not an only child as we previously thought. His parents not only abandoned their children, they apparently abandoned their identities as they are not found in any subsequent censuses.

Clayton did not die in a construction accident. There was such an accident at his workplace in Ohio, but an associate of his was the unfortunate victim. A mistake in the original newspaper article about the accident named Clayton as the fatality. Clayton and Lottie divorced in 1923. He moved on, married another woman and had several more children with her, living mostly in Texas. He died in 1960 in Florida. No one in the family had anything to do with Clayton after he left them.

Lottie, now single in Philadelphia, wrote several letters home. From them we understand she is caring for a sick little baby girl, Margaret Eola, who succumbs in January 1921. Lottie, the 'fun one' of the six Dye sisters, married Ray Powers and lived the rest of her life in New Jersey, where she died in 1953. Both Margaret Meade and granddaughter Joan remember her fondly. Daughter Helen mended fences and resumed a relationship with her mother Lottie. Irene never forgave her mother for giving up the children and leaving Harold to be placed in foster care and they remained estranged.

Final note: Bill's maternal grandfather Walter Hilliard worked with my grandfather Thomas Lawson at Westinghouse in Pittsburgh in the early 1930's. It's a small world.

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An Escaped Slave's Story

Edited by W. M. Baillie

The Richardson Family Papers in the Society's manuscript collection include several folders relating to John Lyman Richardson, who lived at Grovania near the Columbia/Montour County line. Among these is a single sheet dated April 22nd (probably 1864) in which a onetime slave named W. C. Patterson tells briefly the extraordinary story of his life: born a free man, he traveled just before the Civil War to New Orleans and there was enslaved. He escaped, was recaptured, escaped again and eventually made his way to St. Louis, where during the War thousands of escaped southern slaves gathered under Union Army protection.

John L. Richardson probably knew Patterson and may well have taught him to write and encouraged him to write out his little autobiography. Richardson, a longtime educator, had gone from Pennsylvania to St. Louis to teach freedmen reading and writing.

Richardson's life is treated at some length in the Beers *Historical & Biographical Annals of Columbia and Montour Counties*. He was born September 15, 1816 in Jericho, Vermont to an old New England family—both his father and mother were descended from settlers who came from England in the 1630s. At the age of nineteen he began teaching, then studied for four years at Burr Seminary in Vermont. He taught in various places, including Otsego County, New York, and Luzerne County, Pennsylvania.¹

In 1855, while he was principal of Madison Academy in Waverly, PA, Richardson was appointed superintendent of the public schools of Luzerne County, a newly-enacted position which he filled capably for several years. The idea of a county superintendent was strongly opposed by many people as interference with local control of schools, but Richardson's "enlightened attention to [his] duties" enabled him to establish the superintendent's authority and influence over public schooling.

Beers' *Annals* comments that "It seems but natural that a man of such high character and strong sense of justice should have been active in the Abolition cause and later in the betterment of conditions among the former slaves." In April 1863 Richardson accepted an appointment to organize schools for newly-freed slaves in St. Louis on behalf of the American Missionary Association; his salary was to be just \$20 per month plus board—a large reduction from his previous earnings. During his first year there he was busy in organizing schools and employing teachers for them. It is in St. Louis, presumably, that he met W. C. Patterson and received the former slave's brief autobiographical sketch.²

There was violent opposition in St. Louis, however, against teaching African-Americans to read and write. After a few years Richardson had to leave because, as a protégé learned in a letter from him, "the Southerners was burning the school houses down and he was coming back."³

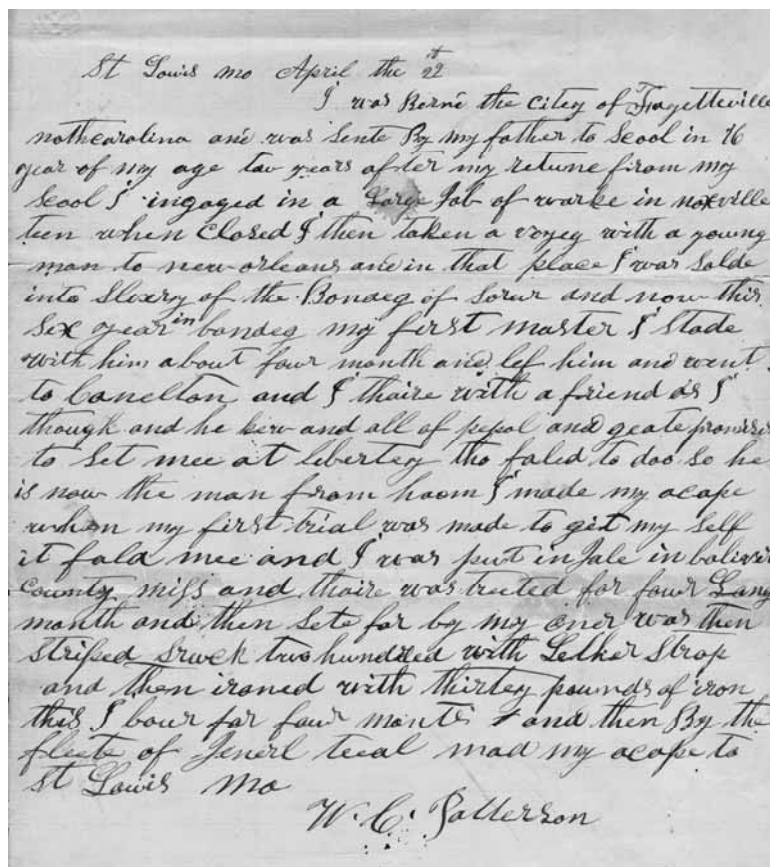
He spent some time traveling to ask for contributions to help freedmen; his notebooks record amounts from 25¢ to \$5 gathered from individuals in towns such as Tioga and Blossburg in Pennsylvania, Butternut, NY, and North Guilford, CT. In his "Collection Book 1867" we find a section of a speech he gave to ask for money, appealing to his audience's sense of basic fairness:

In presenting the righteous claims of the freedmen of this country for your sympathy and support it is not important that we discuss the equality or inequality of the races; for if the African is superior to the Anglo-Saxon he needs present aid, if he is only equal he needs aid and if he is an inferior he needs all the more aid. Aid is what the black man now needs in this country unless we admit the assumption that his normal condition is that of slavery. If God really designed the African for this condition then we should not seek to raise him above it. If God designed him for slavery, then we should not seek his freedom. If God made him to be a

slave, then recent proclamation of Emancipation was a great sin. All efforts to educate him should be at once abandoned, and the sooner he shall be remanded back to his former condition the better.³

But of course, Richardson expected his hearers to conclude, Emancipation was right and hence the African deserves our support.

In 1879 Richardson retired to a farm he bought in Grovania (Cooper Township, Montour County, on the Columbia County line). He died in March, 1885 and was buried at Danville's Odd Fellows cemetery. His son John L. Richardson became the treasurer of the Richard Manufacturing Company of Bloomsburg, and it was probably through his family that the Richardson papers came to the Society's collections.



St Louis mo April the 22^d
I was Borne the Citey of Fayetteville
northcarolina and was Sente By my father to scool in 16
year of my age tow years after my retune from my
scool I ingaged in a Large Job of worke in noxville
teen when closed I then taken a voyeg with a young
man to new-orleans and in that place I was Solde
into Slavery of the Bondeg of Sorur and now this
Six year in bondeg my first master I stade
with him about four month and lef him and went
to Canelton and I thaire with a friend as I
though and he kew and all of pepol and geate promises
to Set mee at libertye tho faled to doo so he
is now the man from hacin I made my acap
when my first trial was made to get my self
it fald mee and I was put in jale in bolivar
County miss and thaire was treated for four Long
month and then set for by my enor was then
Striped druck two hundred with Lelker Strop
and then ironed with thirtty pounds of iron
thid I bouer for four month and then By the
fleet of Jenerl teal mad my acap to
St Louis mo
W.C. Patterson

Reproduced above is the original life story written by escaped slave W. C. Patterson.⁴ Following are two transcriptions, first in a literal reproduction and then regularized. The writer evidently had only very rudimentary training in writing and spelling, but he had an extraordinary story to tell. I have not been able to learn more about him than what he tells here; his last escape "by the fleet of General Teel" possibly refers to a flotilla of Union forces on the Mississippi.

St Louis mo April the 22^d

I was Borne the citey of Fayetteville northcarolina and was Sente By my father to Scool in 16 year of my age tow years after my retune from my Scool I ingaged in a Large Job of worke in noxville teen [Knoxville, TN] when closed I then taken a voyeg with a young man to new-orleans and in that place I was Solde into Slavery of the Bondeg of Sorur and now this Six year in bondeg my first master I stade with him about four month and lef him and went to Canelton and I thaire with a friend as I though and he kew and all of pepol and geate promises to Set mee at libertye tho faled to doo so he is now

the man from whom I made my escape when my first trial was made to get my self it failed me and I was put in jail in Bolivar County miss [Mississippi] and there was treated for four long months and then sent for by my owner was then stripped struck two hundred with Lether Strop and then ironed with thirty pounds of iron this I bore for four months and then By the fleet of General Thiel made my escape to St Lewis mo

W. C. Patterson

St. Louis, MO April 22 [?1864]

I was born in the city of Fayetteville, North Carolina and was sent by my father to school in the 16th year of my age. Two years after my return from school I engaged in a large job of work in Knoxville, Tennessee. When that closed I then took a voyage with a young man to New Orleans, and in that place I was sold into slavery, the Bondage of Sorrow, and now this six years [I spent] in bondage. My first master I stayed with him about four months and left him and went to Canelton [? Canton, MS], and I [stayed] there with a friend, as I thought, and he knew and all of people and got promises to set me at liberty though [he] failed to do so; he is now the man from whom I made my escape. When my first trial was made to get my self [free] it failed me and I was put in jail in Bolivar County, Mississippi and there was treated for four long months and then sent for by my owner. [I] was then stripped, struck two hundred [strokes] with a leather strop, and then ironed [put in irons] with thirty pounds of iron; this I bore for four months and then by the fleet of General Thiel made my escape to St. Louis, Missouri.

W. C. Patterson

NOTES

1. Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1915, vol. 1, pp. 483-88; most of the biographical information herein is from this work. Richardson was named for his mother's father, Revolutionary War veteran John Lyman (1760-1840), who descended from 1631 immigrant Richard Lyman, a founder of Hartford, CT.
2. S. L. Jocelyn (American Missionary Association, New York City) to J. L. Richardson, 26 Feb 1863; CCHGS, Richardson Papers, MS Box #8, folder #3.
3. Ann Elizabeth Green to Laura A. (Richardson) Miller, 7 Oct. 1921; Richardson Papers, folder #3.
4. Richardson Papers, folder #8.

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