

Catherine (Smith) Fowler

by Mrs. G. H. Fowler

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Catherine Smith, the daughter of Samuel Smith and Jane Engle, was born in 1809 in the stone house on the Briar Creek farm below Martzville, where she died in 1899, probably in the same room in which she was born. Her grandfather, John Engle, had built the house and their daughter Jane was living with them while her husband Samuel Smith was building a log house on the 1100-acre tract of land which he had bought along the Susquehanna River below Nescopeck, Pa. Part of the land is still called Smith's Hollow (1932). In 1810 Samuel Smith and Jane Engle went to live there.

Jane Engle was tall, with black hair and gray eyes and white skin. (Looked like May Conner Petty.) Samuel Smith was blond and of medium height.

John Engle still lived in Briar Creek in 1825 when Catherine remembers visiting them. (When did they go to Cunningham where they are buried? Who owned the farm between 1825 and 1844 when John Conner bought it?)

The Smiths lived in a log house at first but later built a charming colonial frame house which has recently been restored. With the river in front and the hills in the back, it is a beautiful location.

There was an old-fashioned garden with all kinds of flowers and herbs; sweet sicily, sage, lavender and Canterbury bells. Roses and wisteria clambered over the porches. This is probably where Catherine got her love of flowers and gardening, which was a keen interest as long as she lived. It is said she was the first person in the community to raise tomatoes which were called love apples and grown for ornament. Celery she also introduced into the neighborhood gardens. Flowers of all kinds were her passion. She continued gardening almost to the end of her life.

Catherine was the oldest of twelve children. She told many tales of the olden days; how her father caught pigeons by hundreds in nets, the breasts which were dried for winter use; shad was caught in the Susquehanna River in the spring and dried or salted.

Every year Samuel Smith made trips to Philadelphia in a covered wagon, taking dried peaches and other farm products. He brought back many lovely things. The pair of china vases, one of which his great granddaughter and her namesake, Katherine Elizabeth Grove has, was among them. There was a whole set of blue willow ware china.

Jane Engle Smith was an expert at handwork, knitting, making quilts, and weaving. Her eldest daughter, Catherine, also became very proficient in these things. A fire of pine knots on the hearth often furnished light for evening work.

The children went to a school about two miles distant. The nearest was through the woods and when the snow was deep, the father dragged a log to make a path. One or two winters, Samuel Smith hired a tutor and held the school in his own home. There were not free schools at that time.

The home was supplied with running water piped from a spring on the hillside. A trough was always kept with fish which had been caught in the river and were kept alive for use whenever needed.

Catherine Smith was five feet two inches in height, blonde and blue-eyed. She was attractive in appearance and calm in temperament. Her sister, Elizabeth, had married Andrew Croll, another a Nungesser. Catherine said years later that she early decided that she would not marry a dutch man if she never married, so at thirty she remained unwed.

Gilbert H. Fowler went to the Smith farm to buy a cow and met Catherine. He at once decided that she should be his wife and they were married about 1841. Mr. Fowler's first wife, Rachel Mack, had been dead about two years. Mr. Fowler had a family of nine children, the youngest, Rachel Jane, being but three years old at the time. The children welcomed their new mother and always had the greatest affection and respect for her as long as she lived, visiting her and inviting her to their homes.

Mr. Fowler was very proud of his pretty wife and when he went to Philadelphia to buy goods for the store, brought her expensive bonnets, shawls and dresses of which she had a great variety. In the house she always wore a cap at first of white lace or linen and then as she grew older of black lace. She wore colors rather than black to the end of her life. Her white hair, black cap and white fisshu made her look every inch a grandmother as she grew older. She grew plump but not heavy and was always attractive in appearance.

In 1853 when Mr. Fowler went to Philadelphia to buy goods, Mrs. Fowler went with him and they went on to New York to see the first World's Fair. They told of the crystal palace and the house made of corn. They brought back furs for their daughters Jane and Elmira.

Between 1866 and 1870 they went to Michigan to visit Isaiah Melick and Elwood Hughes who had gone there from Columbia County. They also visited Stephen Creasy in Iowa. Their son, S. S. Fowler, and wife ran their store and house while they were gone.

They took a trip to Niagara Falls with M. P. Fowler, whose daughter was at school nearby. They brought back bead bags made by the Indians.

The Fowler home at Fowlersville was one of the most comfortable in the community. There were ten rooms in the house which was large for the times. It was provided with running water and other comforts of the times. The store, post office and schoolhouse nearby made the home a center for the vicinity.

Catherine Fowler presided over this large household with dignity and efficiency. Mr. Fowler was a staunch Methodist and active in the church. He had many business activities other than the store, post office, blacksmith shop, and farm. He was a director in the First National Bank of Berwick, and of a bank in Danville.

The oldest son, Samuel Smith Fowler was attending Dickinson Seminary in Williamsport when the Civil War began. He enlisted in 1862, serving until 1865 in the 84th PA having attained the rank of Sergeant Major. After spending four years in business at the old store with his brother Z. T., he went into business in Elizabeth City, NC where he remained until 1898 when he became the head of the Fowler Net and Twine Company in Philadelphia where he is now residing (1932).

Her only daughter, Elmira, married Samuel Jefferson Conner of Briar Creek. The other son, Z. T. Fowler, attend Williamsport Dickinson Seminary, assisted his father in the store for awhile and then located at Willow Grove where he had a store of supplies for the boatmen on the Pennsylvania Canal, later being station master on the DL and W Railroad. In 1900 he went to Scranton to work for the Scranton Correspondence School where he is at the present time (1934). The youngest son, Clem Thompson Fowler, died at the age of four and is buried at the old stone church.

Samuel Smith died in 1864 leaving an estate of \$70,000 to be divided among his twelve children. Catherine gave all of her share to her children but a thousand dollars, which was invested for her in the Danville bank.

After the death of G. H. Fowler in 1874, it was found that his estate, appraised at \$60,000 was so entailed that his widow received but her dowry of \$300. She went to live with her daughter, in the house in which she had been born. She continued to be an enthusiastic gardener. She also knitted and embroidered beautifully, and was much appreciated by her ten grandchildren.

Some years later Jesse Bowman of Berwick wanted to marry her. He was a man of importance in the community, but older than she and she declined.

All her winters were spent in Elizabeth City with her son, S. S. Fowler, or in Philadelphia after he moved there. A Mr. Kramer of Elizabeth City, a widower of her age also sought her in marriage.

She retained all faculties, sight, hearing, clear mind until the end, and always had remarkably good health. About three months before her death, she fell and broke a hip. She was in bed from that time until her death in 1899, probably in the room in which she was born. She lies beside her husband in Pine Grove Cemetery in Berwick, Penna.

Among her grandchildren she lives in memory as a charming old lady whose wise council and kind helpfulness meant much in their childhood. Her namesakes were Katherine Smith Fowler (daughter of Alfred Fowler), Frances Catherine Conner, and Katharine Elizabeth Grove.