

## **SOME HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT NORTHERN COLUMBIA COUNTY**

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In discussing the history of Northern Columbia County, one must separate the wheat from the chaff, as all that is purported to be history is not history at all, rather it is a mixture of truths, half-truths, and in some cases downright untruths depending on the veracity, dependability and objective aims of the those giving the information to the history writers.

We are now in the village of Waller (originally called Hilltown), Jackson Township.

Jackson Township was erected in 1838 of portions taken from Greenwood and Sugarloaf, with the boundary on the east being Fishingcreek and on the west Little Fishingcreek, however the residents of the Fishingcreek side would not tolerate this set up and in 1940 the portion taken from Sugarloaf was re-annexed to it, leaving Jackson as it is today.

The township was named partly for Andrew Jackson and/or Daniel (Silas) Jackson, a supposed relative of the famous Stonewall, who removed from Benton in 1831 and was very active in the proceedings leading to the erection of the township.

Settlement of the township was retarded largely by the dishonest practices of the Asylum Land Company and its agents.

This company of land speculators headed by Frederick Veates by devious methods and collusion with PA Land Office Personnel secured warrants for enormous acreage in Jackson, Greenwood, Pine, and Madison townships, and Lycoming and Sullivan counties.

Prospective settlers found their titles defective, or as in many cases, could not find the land at all.

Jacob Lunger was probably the first settler in 1800, followed by Abram Whitman, Johnathan Robbins, Paul Hess, George Farver, Abram Golder, Benjamin Everhart, John Campbell, Ephraim Parker, and the The New Amsterdam (Dutch) families of Levi Priest, William Waldron and Peter Yorks.

The first school was conducted in a log dwelling near the building in which we are now meeting, formerly the Union Church, which was erected in 1854.

The first Post Office (called Polkville) was established in 1848 at the residence of John P. Hess, now occupied by the grandson J. Brittain Hess, just west of town.

In 1879 a Post Office was opened at Derrs with A. J. Derr as Postmaster.

So much for Jackson Township, and now we turn to Benton Township and Benton Borough.

Benton Township was erected in April 1850 by taking the north end of Fishingcreek Township from the present south boundary of Benton Township to the southern boundary of Sugarloaf and naming it in honor of Thomas H. Benton, a political figure of the time.

Peter Appleman was probably the first resident, residing on the farm now occupied by Robert E. and H. Dayne Kline, described as the southern boundary of Putney Common in the deed of 1789. In this deed Ezekiel Cole was described as the north boundary.

The northern half of Putney Common (500 acres plus) was warranted to James Athill, March 1770, and the southern half of like acreage to Francis Hopkinson, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1770, both deeds being recorded in Coventry, England.

The southern half was sold in 1789 to the Warren family of New Jersey, who in turn sold it in 1831 to Michael Hartman of Orwigsburg, Schuylkill County, whose son, George, built the first permanent house (known as Dr. Patterson house) in Benton, according to the will of Michael Hartman in 1847.

In 1800 Daniel (or more likely Silas) Jackson having purchased land at a fork of Fishingcreek built a log cabin near the fork and occupied it until 1831, when the Hartmans came to claim their land. Mr. Jackson finding that the land he bought was on another Fishingcreek, moved over to what is now Jackson Township.

An early settler was Cornelius Coleman on land purchased by his father, Benjamin Coleman, from Daniel McHenry in 1791, still occupied by descendants of Cornelius Coleman.

Benjamin Coleman, my great-great-great-grandfather, was a resident of Bethlehem Twp, Hunterdon County, NJ and never lived in Columbia County.

My great-great-grandfather, William Eager and his wife, Elizabeth, of Orange County, NY, secured warrants dated April 22, 1793 for 800 acres of land on the hill just across the creek from Benton, for which they paid 6.5 cents per acre.

Other early settlers were Peter Dildine, Jonathan Colley, James Peterman, Jesse Pennington, Young, and Uriah McHenry.

John McHenry, the first white child born in the up-creek area (married Helena Cutter, the daughter of Samuel Cutter and Mary Cole, a first cousin of Ezekiel Cole), started the McHenry Distillery about 1812 at a spring on his farm west of Benton Borough, which thrived for over 100 years.

The first mill in the township was built in 1819 or 1820 by Ezekiel Cole for his son, Isaiah, and was washed away by the flood of 1848.

Isaiah rebuilt the mill at the site of the light plant, but ran into financial difficulties and the mill was sold by the sheriff September 6, 1858 to Bob Swartout as a place for his brother John of New Rochelle, NY.

Another mill was built shortly after the turn of the century (exact date unknown) by George Hess and is still in operation, now operated by Norman B. Cole, who was recently the subject of an enlightening illustrated article in "The Pennsylvania Farmer."

So much for Benton and Benton Twp., and let us move up the creek in the northernmost and most-maligned township of Columbia County, as far as history is concerned.

In the histories of Columbia County, where all the pages relating to Sugarloaf Township were deleted, very little factual history would be lost.

All this did not just happen, but was actuated by malicious intent, with a nefarious purpose in the mind of the man giving the ill-intended information to the history writers, and being a newcomer was almost totally ignorant of the facts, as is quite the usual thing in such cases.

A recent purported historical map of Columbia County by Mr. Wilt of Towanda, PA, shows everything north of Benton owned by John J. Godhard.

The mistake is not Mr. Wilt's, but rather the Columbia County history from which he took his data.

Sugarloaf was erected in 1813 by severance of the north end of Fishingcreek, and by Connecticut Yankee influence the name of Harrison applied to it, which the sturdy PA Dutch and Germans from NJ absolutely refused to accept, applying their own name, Sugarloaf, to the township.

After the massacre at Wyoming, volunteers were called for to form the "Rangers on the Frontier for Northumberland County," (not a very choice assignment as it was considered that the opportunity of having one's hair parted by a tomahawk was excellent). Ezekiel Cole, a veteran of the Continental Line, joined the Company of Lt. Christian Rhoads coming to Columbia County under Moses Van Campen, patrolling from Fort Augusta to Forty Forts (Fort) and west to Fort Brady, thus being in all probability the first white man to completely explore the Fishingcreek valley, and was discharged from service in 1783.

In 1786 he returned to Columbia County in company of a neighbor, William Hess, (an officer of the Continental Line) of Williams Township, Northampton County, and these two bought in Fishingcreek valley all the flat land from the North line of Putney Common to the (northernmost point) above Jamison City and up the west branch to above the village of Elk Grove.

The settlement took place in 1790 or early 1791 as the first child of Ezekiel Cole and Elizabeth Hess, Catherine by name, was born December 25, 1791 in a log cabin across the road from Greystone.

The first four families to come to Sugarloaf at this time were those of John Keil (Kile), Godfrey Dils (Diltz), William Hess and Ezekiel Cole.

William Hess had ten sons and eight daughters, and Ezekiel Cole had five sons and nine daughters (two sons and three daughters by his first wife, Rebecca Coleman).

In 1794 Ezekiel Cole started to build his gristmill by constructing the dam and race, and at the wasteway of the race he built an Indian Hammermill operated by a small waterwheel to hammer grain for their own use, and built a small distillery at a spring about one mile up Colescreek, presumably for their own use also.

This was last operated by Norman Cole about 75 years ago.

The gristmill was then completed and started to operate in March 1802, being the first successful mill north of the river.

Next in 1803 a log schoolhouse was built on the northwest corner of the plot, set aside by Ezekiel Cole for a church, graveyard and school, and was used until 1837 when the township schools were set up.

The log schoolhouse stood until September 1865 when it was destroyed by soldiers.

Next to be built in 1806 was the stone house now called Greystone and is now owned by Thomas Lockard.

Then, about 1810, the house being completed, the log church was started at Zeke Cole's Meeting Place and completed in 1812, to which we now turn our attention.

According to the Columbia County histories, John J. Godhard was a wealthy Englishman, was a patriot, was an Episcopalian, and had a large family of daughters, that he bought an enormous tract of land at the headwaters of Fishingcreek. One source says it extended from Benton to the mountain; another source grows bolder and says that he planned the church, gave toward it and assisted in the building of it.

Now let us see how much truth is in all of this.

My great-great-great-grandfather, Johannes Jacob Godhard, was most certainly not an Englishman (he was a German from the Palatinate), nor was he an Episcopalian. He was definitely a Reformed, as just a casual perusal of the First Reformed Church records will prove.

He was a patriot as the archives show and he may have been wealthy.

As for the large family of daughters, Mr. Godhard had three, Mrs. Henry (Elizabeth) Deberger, Mrs. Jacob (Mary) Frentchey, and Mrs. William (Catherine) Hess.

He never actually owned anything in Columbia County, although he did in 1794 bargain to buy 200 acres of Edward and Sarah McHenry and 201 acres of Daniel McHenry which the Deberger heirs paid for in 1800 and these are the original deeds.

Mr. Godhard never lived in Columbia County and only ever visited here twice, 1794 and 1796.

That he planned the church, gave toward it and helped in the building is certainly one for the "Ripley's Believe it or Not," as Mr. Godhard was dead for 13 years before the church was started, lying in Mahoning Township, Northumberland County at Jacob Frentchey's in the spring of 1797, his will being probated June 7, 1797 at Sunbury in Will Book 1, page 183.

In the year 1796 or before, Ezekiel Cole bought 230 acres of land warranted to one Reinhart Miller in 1784 in Land Book 14, page 281.

In the year 1796 or before, Ezekiel and his wife, Elizabeth Hess, set aside two acres 96 perches of this land and had it surveyed by Edward McHenry as a gift for a school, graveyard and church, for and to the use of the Presbyterian, Episcopalian and Lutheran congregations.

Exactly when services were first held here is not known, however a letter dated July 7 or 9 1796 (in possession [1939] of Mr. C. A. Coleman of Butztown, PA) from Cornelius Coleman on the west bank of Fishingcreek to his brother at the forks of the Delaware, says in part: The Sunday before we went to services at Zeke's Meeting Place and it took almost 3 hours by ox, and since we were the last the boys cut logs for seats. William Hess and John Gettardt (Godhard) talked.

So it is evident that services were held there before the first Sunday of July 1796.

This photostatic copy of the deed recorded in Columbia County Deed Book 12, pages 533 and 534 I wish to present to the Historical Society, the original of which with the words Presbyterian and Lutheran included was last known to have been in the possession of John Swartout the evening of June 6<sup>th</sup> 1881.

Rev. Jacob Keiler (Keller), Lutheran, and Rev. Hermanus (Hermandus) Funk, probably Reformed, were two of the earliest preachers at St. Gabriel's and their record book was found in 1926 when the Zeke Cole Meeting Place was torn down; but it has disappeared, in all probability destroyed.

Other preachers there in the early days were Rev. John Kramer, Rev. Shelhardt, and Rev. Baraghey, all Lutherans, whose records likewise cannot be found.

Presbyterians, the McHenrys, the Cooleys, the Petermans, the Penningtons and the Eagers, were all out of the church prior to 1845 and I can find no record of the Presbyterian preachers serving the church.

One history states that it appears that the Presbyterians and Lutherans made some use of the church in the early days. As a matter of fact, they made practically all the use of the church in those days.

At our Benton meeting three years ago, Professor Hummel very effectively debunked the idea of the Fishingcreek Confederacy, and now I would like to state that the fiasco up the creek was nothing more or less than a conspiracy between the Republican party and the Army to keep the Democrats from voting.

The main body of soldiers of the Department of the Susquehanna were camped on my grandfather's farm where Hervey Long now lives, and my father was mail boy to Lt. Col. Stuart, the drunken lout that commanded the regiment and spent all his time at the hotel bending his elbow, until grandmother would chase him out with her old hickory broom on his back.

Looking south from the door of this hall and just a little to the left is a large white barn where the soldiers hung the boy, because he would not tell where his father was.