

John N. Wrighter Family History

Preface: This historical essay was originally written for Thelma Sumner in 1980. It is based on conversations with Thelma, the Susquehanna County Centennial History and The History of Susquehanna County by Miss Emily C. Blackman. Since 1980, information from a volume of the Life of Samuel Preston has been added to the original work. Although Pennsylvania was chartered in 1681 by King Charles II and conveyed to William Penn, it was not until 1819 that any permanent settlers came to what is now known as Thompson Township, an area of great forests and rolling mountains. (#1) It was an area once dominated and foraged by Indian tribes (Oneida, Tuscarora and Delaware).

John N. Wrighter came to what is now Thompson in 1819 at the age of 39 with his wife, Ann and eight children. They took residence on 100 acres of land in the wilderness, two miles from any other settler (Cox property near what is now Coxtan Lake). It was located near a pond and he and his family were the pioneers of Thompson. He came here by way of Pleasant Mount with his wife and eight children. He was originally from Dutchess County near the Hudson River in New York. His father was a native of Bavaria and his wife was born and brought up in London. Having lost his property in Dutchess County (reason unknown), he was very poor when the family came to the new property. The family endured many privations in addition to those of conquering a dense wilderness. They made their first shelter by the side of a log using boards from both their wagon and boards left by lumbermen. It was in this manner that they found shelter until they built a log house. For three weeks they were near starvation. They had to subsist on frozen potatoes and what meat John could procure with his rifle. (#3)

John was a blacksmith and sometimes worked through the week in Harmony Pa which was eleven miles distant. (#2) He would work Monday through Saturday. On Saturday night he would buy a bushel of meal and other needed necessities, put them on his back and walk home. John was a cool and fearless hunter and killed many wild animals. The woods at that time abounded in elk, deer, bear, wolves, wild cats and panthers. He is reported to have seen herds of thirty or forty elk near his home. If it had not been for his rifle his family may have starved. Though Mr. Wrighter has been classed among hunters, he cultivated a farm and devoted but part of his time to hunting.

Mr. Wrighter built a log cabin and cleared his land. (#5) When the Belmont turnpike and Onaquaga road passed through Thompson and was extended to Lanesboro, John worked on the crew to clear the trail. The pay for that work enabled him to pay off the debt

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watch the cows swim in the lake. The hillsides were returning to forest. The wild animals had returned – the deer, a few bears and wild turkeys. The laurel is now struggling for sunlight as cottagers do not understand their worth. The waters of the lake has lost much of its clarity. Fish are finding the environment increasingly difficult. But, change goes on. Thelma had seen much of the circle. In recognition of her efforts and undying love for Wrighter Lake, I toast her as "Miss Wrighter Lake".

#1 In 1819, James Monroe was in his first term as President of the United States.

#2 Harmony was located by the first great bend in the Susquehanna River. It was east of what is now Lanesboro. It was founded in 1789 by Samuel Preston who establish a trail from Stockport, Pa on the west bank of the Delaware River six miles north of what is now Hancock.

#3 The first settler to Thompson Center arrived in 1823 and commenced clearing a farm on the Starucca Creek.

#4 Thompson was originally named Thomson. It was named after a circuit judge with the last name of Thomson. When the judge fell out of favor with a majority of residents, the 'P' was added. Hence, it became Thompson.

#5 Go directly up the rise from the cottage built by George Meade and George Pickering.

#6 The name for the lake went through three interactions. First, 'The Breeches Pond', because the shoreline was surrounded by mountain laurel and reminded them of ladies breeches. Second, Wrighter's Pond. Neither of these two names became official. The name Wrighter Lake appeared on a map of Thompson Township in 1876.

Written by RP Frey II