

Jefferson Township

Two hundred years ago the land we now know is Jefferson Township was a favorite hunting ground of the Indians. Very few white man had ever set foot in the area. The Indians to make hunting more easy, had set fire to much of the wooded area and burned off all the unwanted underbrush. The result was a series of cleared areas called "glades." Later on the Glades made the white man's work of clearing the land easier

About 1795, a small group of white hunters crossed the Allegheny River and wandered into Butler County. They liked what they saw, and one of them named Patrick Graham, decided to claim a section of land for his own. All one had to do to claim land was to build a small log cabin--it did not need to have a roof--and girdle trees so that they would die. These things indicated that the man truly decided to return and settle on the property.

Graham filled these simple requirements returned to his home in Westmoreland County to collect his family and to return to Butler County. In 1796 he and his wife, Elizabeth, set out. They were a young Scottish-Irish couple from Ireland and were very poor. They already had three small children. All they brought with them were their clothing, a few household linens, and their pots and pans. Patrick and Elizabeth walked. She carried a tiny baby. All other belongings were stuffed into two bags which were thrown on the horse's backs. Since the other two children were too small walk, they were stuffed into the bags also, with only their little heads sticking out. When the family arrived at their new home, Patrick put a roof on the cabin, built crude log furniture and set to work clearing the land. Theirs was a lonely life, as the nearest neighbor lived five miles away and there were no roads or paths. In 1798, Elizabeth gave birth to the first white child born in Jefferson Township, a boy named Patrick.

Life was hard. There were so many bears and wolves in the forest that it was almost impossible to keep cows or sheep. Cutting trees and clearing the land was backbreaking toil and only the necessities of life were available.

By 1800, more settlers had arrived. Squatters tried to steal Patrick's land, but eventually he won it for himself. By this time there was a settlement at Neyman's Mill on Bonnie Brook Creek, on what is now route 422. All staples had to be brought in from Westmoreland County. As a result, a path that had once been an old Indian trail was utilized to serve as a bridle path which leads to Logan's Ferry on the Allegheny River. Over this path men would travel to Westmoreland County, get their supplies and return home. Today you share the same trail when you drive over Bonnie Brook Road from Route 422 to Route 356.

The Butler-Freeport Pike chartered in 1803, was completed in 1815. In 1825, Nathan Skeer laid out the village of Hannahstown he built the first tavern and inn in the township. This is the old brick building still standing in Hannahstown at the corner of Route 356 and Marwood Road. (Editors note: This building was razed and the property paved to become Mason's Used Car Lot-circa 2000)

In 1825, David Logan brought 225 acres of land along what is now the Saxonburg Road, and built a fine brick house. He later increased his land to over 300 acres which were divided among his children at his death. Today old farm houses along Saxonburg Road between Jefferson Center and Butler once belonged to David Logan's children.

Grist mills and sawmills sprung up at various locations making it easier to obtain flour and sawed lumber.

About 1831, the great German immigration began. Most of these Germans were very poor, but they were not afraid of hard work and some prosperous farms replaced the forest.

No villages existed in the township in the early years except Jefferson Center. Here one found a grist mill, sawmill, creamery, blacksmith shops, and farm implement manufacturing shops. The only other village in the township was Great Belt which came into being at the time of the oil excitement. It seems that the German farmers preferred trading in Saxonburg where they can eat good German food and visit their old friends.

The German and Scotch Irish groups got along well but encouraged the children not to intermarry. The Scotch Irish felt the Germans made their wives work too hard and the Germans wanted to keep their German bloodlines pure.

Traveling ministers brought the Presbyterian and Methodist faith to the early settlers. Our St. Luke's Lutheran Church was established in the mid 1830s. Education began in 1806 in a one room crude cabin and has progressed to today's fine school system.

Agriculture was, for years, the main industry of the township. Everywhere one saw well tilled land and substantial homes. Lately the tide has turned and many of the farms have been divided into building lots and the farms grow fewer. However, the whole area is still beautiful and a good place to live.

By Sarah Bachman.