

A HISTORY OF JEFFERSON TOWNSHIP

by Kathryn Campbell Slasor

Wolves, panthers, wildcats and small game were the earliest inhabitants of the rugged terrain between the streams of Harmon Creek and Cross Creek in western Pennsylvania. Boxed in by the townships of Hanover, Cross Creek, Independence and Smith as well as Brooke County, WV, on its western edge, this rich and fertile parcel of howling wilderness has been known since June 16, 1853, as Jefferson Township.

Roughly triangular in shape, Jefferson was once a part of Hopewell and Cross Creek townships, and still earlier was known as West Augusta. Early settlers chipped away at the heavy stands of virgin timber, and the huge oaks and hemlocks disappeared. Clearings revealed pioneers hard at work, building homes, schools, churches, and a new standard of living.

Beginning in 1834, schools were of one-room design, named for land owners on whose property they were built. Cole, Gardner, Lee, Melvin, Miller and Hanlin were forerunners. Other schools were built at Eldersville, Penobscot, Shintown, Bertha and Turney. The unique Eldersville Normal School became a prestigious center of education, propelling eager students to the teaching profession. Sessions were held from 1881 to 1915. The founder of this popular institution was Samuel, a descendant of Jonas Amspoker, one of the area's first patentees. A later teacher, author, and historian at the school was a native son of Jefferson, Professor Elza Scott, one of the most brilliant men of his day.

The Pennsylvania Railroad was built in 1865, and Hanlin Station and Dinsmore sprang to life. Improved roads ribboned across the land and connected the 1814 village of Eldersville, founded by Thomas Ward, to the "big towns" of Burgettstown and Follansbee, in nearby neighborhoods.

Churches were built and worshippers gathered on the Sabbath at Bethel Methodist in 1813, Eldersville Methodist in 1829, the Wesleyan Methodist in 1844, and Pine Grove Presbyterian in 1849. The Roman Catholic faction held regular Sunday School classes in a primitive shack "down the hollow" on McCready lands after the turn of the 20th century. Aided by the Irish Ridge Society, all flourished for a time, then weakened and finally died, leaving only the present Eldersville Methodist within the township bounds.

Farms became populated with sheep, as tillers of the soil such as Lorin D. McCready added to his flock of both coarse and fine wool. Dairy cattle carefully picked their way along steep hillsides of farms such as those of Nick Bertovich, Frank Pastor, Anton Resnik and Joe Macugoski. Fresh milk found its way to market through the daily travels of Van Nest Wiegmann with his milk wagon and faithful horse. Apple orchards of Doc and Cyrus Boles, Alvy Robertson, and Shorty Wiegmann painted the landscape a delicate pink and white each Spring.

When veins of coal were discovered along the southern tip of the township, a booming mining business resulted at Penobscot, Jefferson, and Seldom Seen. At the Penowa Station, trade and travel became possible. A new era was born. In 1903, life took on a new meaning to folks in that area who were ignorant of the outside world. The Wabash Railroad could now carry them there.

At about the same time, to the north of the Wabash, the Bertha Consumer Company opened mines that brought about the building of many homes and a five-room school. The Camp of Bertha Mine was booming. Nearly simultaneously, the little town of Shintown sprang up between Eldersville and the Panhandle Railroad, along whose tracks the village of Hanlin Station became a busy go-between from Jefferson's rural residents to the more urban neighborhoods a few miles away.

With the growth of villages and mining camps, a natural follower was the establishment of stores. Probably one of the first such "businesses" was the Allingham hotel and tavern in Eldersville which stood on the corner where three primitive roadways met. This infamous edifice was the scene of an horrendous murder in 1872 which was the result of differences of opinion over the temperance and slavery issues of that century. As time went by, the structure was used by a number of storekeepers. Other buildings later were converted to general stores or Coal Company stores. These grew up, not only in Eldersville, but in Hanlin, Shintown, Bertha, Penobscot, and Penowa. Among the proprietors of these businesses were the following persons whose names still ring a bell with elderly citizens of Jefferson: Frank Luciano, John Sultie, W.K. Truax, Max Little, Joseph Saska, Frank Barber, Edna Noah, John Boles, Gabe Hastings, Frank Rotunda, Joe Pribish, John Wiesneski, and a man named Castrodale.

Across Cedar Grove Road from the Allingham Hotel was an elongated two story structure which probably housed the first mercantile business in the township. Later residents remember this as Boles's store. Hugh Patterson and William Wilson were the founders of this enterprise about the year 1850. In the late 1860s, Hugh sold it to his nephews, Henry and John Cooper, who made it into one of the most thriving store businesses in the tri-state area. After the Civil War, Robert Osburn returned from military duty and set up a general store further east on Cedar Grove Road. It later became known as Hattie Osburn's Hat Shoppe. Meanwhile, another veteran of that war, James Gillespie, came to Eldersville and established a competitive business on the corner, endearing himself to the aged and shut-ins by hitching up his old mule or scraggly looking horse and ancient wagon and with grocery supplies to last for many a day, traveled the muddy byways of the township delivering his wares.

had lived through two major tragedies at the loss of two of the people dearest to her in life. Yet she had picked up the pieces of her broken dreams, and started again. She was certainly not going to give up now.

The story told to this writer by her grandson, the second Edward McFadden, goes something like this. One day when the two of them were hard at work in the corncrib, shelling corn, and sharing the easy communion that had developed between them, Annie again brought up the subject of marriage. Once again, Alfred assured her that his reluctance had nothing to do with his feelings for her, but simply that he could not bring himself to marry. Without another word, Annie arose from the little stool where she was seated, lay down the basket of unfinished corn ears, walked quietly out the door, and locked it behind her. As she started for the house, she called back to him over her shoulder, "When you decide to marry me, just let me know, and I'll let you out." And the rest is history.

Annie and Alfred shared a reasonably long married life until her death at the age of 92. At that time, Alfred took her to the Independence Cemetery and buried her beside her beloved daughter, Estelle, and first husband, Edward McFadden. He survived her by but two years and was laid to rest at Brooke Cemetery in Wellsburg beside others of the Lauck family.

In researching the McFadden family for clues which would substantiate the meager information found in old obituaries and graveyard records, this writer was fortunate indeed to have come across Annie's grandson - also an Edward McFadden. He is the son of Annie's little George McFadden who survived the scarlet fever epidemic of 1910. It was from this grandson that the intriguing story of the corncrib episode was gleaned. Deepest gratitude from this writer is hereby extended. The encounter was one of great satisfaction, this Edward being a compulsive teller of stories with an unsurpassed sense of humor and a warm, disarming, personal charm. It makes this writer wonder if perhaps it was this same McFadden charm which, more than a century ago, enticed pretty Annie Ralston to marry the FIRST Edward McFadden who was born and raised just across the line fence of her father's farm.