

**The
William Pettibon
Homestead**

Cross Creek Township, Washington County, PA

**By
June Campbell Grossman-Welch**

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society

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NOTE: The extensive research required on the families later occupying this homestead as well as innumerable interviews with Thelma Pettibon Potts who provided much of the information on the Pettibon family was performed by Kathryn Campbell Slasor. The story concerning these later families and the material on "the little foundation" is also authored by Kathryn.

In the Cross Creek Township Census of 1840, there is recorded a William "Pettebone" living near Charles Scott, three Magee families, Frederick Kline, a Sutherland, and a Metcalf. To the well-versed local historian, these names are powerful indicators that this part of Cross Creek Township was the locale soon to become Jefferson. This is, in fact, a fairly complete roster of the farms bordering the southern end of Bethel Ridge Road from the Bethel Methodist Church to the top of Virginville Hill. The place where this William Pettebone lived, at the taking of that 1840 census, was to become known for more than a century and a half as the Pettibon Homestead.

Little is known about this couple and their six sons and one daughter numbered with them at that point in time. In the 1880 census, their children indicate that William was born in Maryland, but their mother, Catherine Ward Pettibon, was a native of Pennsylvania. A brief family history, probably written in the late 1970s, gives the birth of the eldest child, Elihu, as 22 October 1830. The writer of that history listed birth dates of thirteen children beginning with the aforementioned Elihu. These births included two sets of twins, namely, Christopher and Benjamin, born in 1838, with Eleanor and Rebecca arriving in 1851.

For the most part, their offspring were born at intervals of two or two-and-a-half years. The one major exception was that of the thirteenth child, Albert, who arrived on the first day in December of 1858, a period of seven years and seven months after the birth of the twelfth child, Rebecca. According to the given birthdate of the mother, which agrees with census records and her tombstone inscription, she was past fifty years of age at Albert's birth.

Just how many of these children were born in the old Pettibon log house is not known. The young couple does not appear in the 1830 census record of this area, so were apparently elsewhere at the time the census was taken. If they settled there before October of 1830, when their eldest child was born, then all of their children were born on this homestead. In later census records examined, all of the children recorded list their birthplace as Pennsylvania. Census records for 1800 through 1830 for all bordering townships and for the state of Virginia have been consulted for other Pettibon listings but only two were found. The Pettibon name occurs in Hanover Township in 1810 where a young man named Benjamin Pettebone is listed with his family. (It is interesting to note that William and Catherine named one of their twin sons Benjamin.) The other Pettibon listing is that of an Elizabeth Pettibon, age 15, living with a Joseph Corbin family in Cross Creek Township in 1850. In 1860, at age

24, she is listed in Hopewell Township with a McClay family. She then disappears from the records.

Inasmuch as extensive research has turned up nothing further on the early days of this family, we must assume that William, having been born in Maryland in 1795 (according to his tombstone), made his way westward, where he met and married Catherine Ward, daughter of James Ward of Hanover Township. This marriage is believed to have occurred 4 April 1828.

NOTE: Reference in this text has been made to the Pettibon Family History circa 1970. This document has presented one puzzling fact. The compiler lists the couple as having eight sons before any daughters are produced. The first girl listed in this history is Martha, born in 1845. Yet five years before Martha's birth, the 1840 census lists, in addition to the six sons (which agrees with the family history), a daughter between the ages of 5 and 10. Why is she not listed in the family history? Could she be the Elizabeth discussed in a previous paragraph? If so, why is she not living at home in 1850 when she was 15 years of age? Or was she simply working for this Corbin family? If the female child listed in 1840 is not Elizabeth, who was she and what became of her? In the 1850 census, a girl named Mary Babel, age 15, is listed as a resident in the Pettibon home. Could she be this eldest daughter who has married a man named Babel? Perhaps she is back home helping her mother with her younger siblings. Since family members are buried in the graveyard at Bethel Church, why is this child not among them if she died after the 1840 census? Any reader who can resolve this situation is asked to contact the A.D.White Center at the address listed on the cover page so that an accurate account of this old pioneer family may be recorded.

The land on which William Pettibon settled was patented before 1800 under such names as Levinns and Metcalf. Most historians believe that none of these people built on the land or lived there. In all probability, William, himself, built the log house in which he was to spend the rest of his life. It contained four rooms, two upstairs and two down. It had a total of six windows, one in each end of the house and one in each of the four rooms. The closed stairway led off the kitchen, which was on the observer's left side when viewed from the front. Occupants of the upstairs were forced to trespass through one bedroom to get to the other – a feat not too conducive to privacy. A grate fireplace occupied the end opposite the stairwell on the lower floor. Eventually, both grate and kitchen stove provided heat. In later years, a façade of lap siding, painted white, hid the log structure. But passersby in the early days remember “just black logs”.

Of the day-to-day life of William Pettibon, little is known. However, a few scant pieces of information found among the writings of the late A.D.White provide the reader with an insight into the character of the man. The following “story” illustrates a little of this “character”.

It is not known what the religious background of William was prior to his coming to Cross Creek Township. His earthly remains and that of his children who lived out their lives in this area are interred at the Bethel Graveyard just a mile or so from the

Pettibon log house. Bethel Church, which joins the graveyard, was of the Methodist faith. But in 1849, a number of persons in the area surrounding the Pettibon homestead banded together to form the Pine Grove Presbyterian Church. A building was constructed just down over the hill from William's house not far from Creswell's Mill – later known as Kidds Mill.

The congregation was in existence from 1849 until approximately 1886. It was always a small group and inasmuch as this was a period of great unrest due to the imminent Civil War, it fell prey to the turmoil of the age and disintegrated in less than a forty year span. During its existence, however, William played a role which has been recorded by the late A.D.White.

As given in the original records of this church, William Pettibon was the first person received into membership of the Pine Grove Church upon examination by the session at their first meeting on 8 December 1849. He had already been elected to the office of trustee on 17 October in the same year.

It is not the purpose of this discussion to iterate the circumstances of William's importance in this church. But a letter composed by him to the session of the church on 8 February 1863 demonstrates conclusively that William Pettibon was a very literate man, very articulate in expression, and very sincere and well versed in his knowledge and belief in the scriptures. His descendants would do well to read this old document that they might better grasp the level of accomplishment and intelligence of their ancestor.

Of the thirteen children of William and Catherine Pettibon, little information has surfaced about nine of them. In 1978, Eloise Pettibon Morris, a descendant of the eldest son, Elihu, contacted historian, A.D.White, for information on her great grandfather. The only facts she, herself, knew at the time were that in 1857, Elihu had married Hulda Matthews, after which they moved to DeWitt County, Illinois, then in 1876, went further west to Deerfield, Missouri, where they later died. Nothing further concerning Elihu is known by this writer.

The second son, James, fourth son, John, and twin sons numbered 5 and 6, Benjamin and Christopher, may have later followed their elder brother, since they do not appear in any local census records after leaving the family nest.

Four daughters were born after the eight sons and little is known of them. Martha, the eldest, was still home in 1870 but was gone by 1880. One of the twins, Eleanor, died in 1874 at age 22. Her sister, Nancy, died the next year at age 27. Rebecca, the other twin, was still home with her mother in 1880, but nothing further is known of her.

The eighth son, David, married Cornelia Leopold. To them were born five daughters and one son. Four of their daughters lived very long lives. The three eldest, namely, Mary, Laura, and Sarah, remained single, while Effie, the fourth daughter, married John Buchanan. Jane Ann, the youngest, married Harry Bebout. Their only son, Lewis Pettibon, married Anna Wiegman. They were the parents of two sons and a daughter. David and family appear to have lived most of their lives in the Oakdale area.

The youngest son, Albert, married Catherine Stroud, daughter of James and Jane Stroud of Independence Township. They were the parents of eight children, living most of their lives on St. Johns Road in Brooke County, WV. They lived to celebrate 61 years of wedded life.



Only two of the thirteen Pettibon children remained close to home after marriage. These were: son #3, William, Jr. and son #7, Thomas. Census records, however, testify to the fact that all thirteen of these children were never in any hurry to leave the nest. They were, to all appearances, happy at home, even though "home" was a four room log house which afforded little or no privacy and not much room for stretching. Some census listings show ten or eleven adults, counting the parents, living there at one time, even though many were of an age when they might well have been off on their own. Theirs may have been a closely knit unit where the keyword was love. All of the children grew to adulthood – a rarity in those days, and nothing is known of any tragic events as they were growing up.

The third son, William, Jr., never was far from home. He married Nancy Metcalf, daughter of John Metcalf, a neighbor of the Pettibons. William and Nancy had seven children, three of whom died in infancy, and are buried at Bethel. Those who survived, for the most part, continued to live in the Jefferson Township area which

their descendants to the fifth generation still call "home". John Van Nest Cole Pettibon, the eldest, married Almira Price, while Katherine wed Robert Kidd. The remaining two children – Thomas and Anna – married Minnie and Louis Wiegmann, thus making their children double cousins. The only known descendants from this third generation still living today are Sarah Pettibon Cassidy, daughter of Thomas and Minnie Wiegmann Pettibon, and Helen Wiegmann Martin, daughter of Louis and Anna Pettibon Wiegmann. Both "girls" are, in 2002, well into their nineties in age.

It was the seventh son, Thomas, who remained on the old Pettibon homestead, and with whom this treatise is most concerned. Thomas had been born in 1841 and was sandwiched in as the middle child, with six siblings coming before him and six after. He did not marry until about 1878 at the age of 37. His chosen bride was Sarah Stroud, a sister of the Catherine Stroud his baby brother, Albert, would marry five years later. Shortly before his marriage, the family had experienced three deaths in the family circle: his sister, Eleanor, in 1874, his sister, Nancy, in 1875, and his father, William, in 1876. His mother must have been nearly out of her mind with grief over this triple loss. Perhaps this is the reason that William brought his bride home to the log house to start housekeeping rather than to strike out on his own. (It is not known to this writer whether Catherine willed the farm to Thomas or not, but those "in the know" still living today maintain that there was always bad blood between Thomas and Albert. This may have been over the issue of which son inherited the home place.) The fact that his sister, Rebecca, and young brother, Albert, were still at home may not have created the ideal situation, but the young couple must have attempted to adjust to it. What they could not know was that their troubles were only beginning.

On 29 March 1879, a son, James Creighton Pettibon, was born to Thomas and Sarah in the old log house which had now seen much of birth and death. The joy of having this first child was, however, to be quickly dispelled. Nearly thirteen months later on 22 April 1880, Sarah gave birth to a baby daughter, Sally Alberta. Sarah died at the birth of this child and two months later on June 27th, "Baby Sally", as she had affectionately been labeled, went to join her mother in the great beyond. Apparently Thomas was beside himself with grief. When the census taker arrived in that year of 1880, Sarah and Baby Sally were gone, and no mention is made of little Creighton, aged one. Perhaps one of Thomas's sisters had taken the toddler until Thomas could cope with this double tragedy.

A little over two years after Sarah's death, Thomas's mother, Catherine Ward Pettibon, also passed away. This was in November of 1882. Two months later, the youngest of the Pettibon children, Albert, married and moved out. Apparently Albert did not receive what he may have felt was his just share of things or he did not wish to have further altercations with his brother, Thomas. For whatever reason, Albert left the nest at his mother's death and struck out on his own. Except for Thomas and little Creighton, this left but one other person living in the old log house which had seen so much of life the past half century. This other person was Thomas's youngest sister, Rebecca, who was still unmarried, at least until 1880. It is not known just when she moved out or exactly what became of her. But no further mention was made of her in tales handed down by the family.

It must have been a lonely life for little Creighton and his father. It is known that he attended the local schools – probably the one room Millers School just down the road – as well as Eldersville Normal School and Wellsburg High. Creighton was a nice looking young man and highly esteemed in the neighborhood. At some point in time, the inevitable happened. He became acquainted with a pretty young lady who lived just down over the steep hillside below the Pettibon homestead at the spacious boarding house of Kidds Mill.



Her name was Edna Murchland and the boarding house was efficiently operated by her mother, Agnes Kidd Murchland. Edna could probably empathize with Creighton's trauma of having lost a parent while yet a child, for when she was very small, her father, James M. Murchland, departed for parts unknown, leaving her mother with a set of twins and little Edna and no bread winner in the household. It was through the operation of the Kidds Mill Boarding House that Agnes was able to provide for her children. But whatever the attraction may have been, Creighton seems to have been properly smitten with the pretty face in the valley. Just out of sight from the old log house, he constructed a new farm house into which he moved his bride in 1906. This "honeymoon house" is still standing in 2002.



The new farmhouse had a sitting room, a living room, one bedroom and a small kitchen downstairs. The upstairs contained two very large bedrooms. Down over a steep hill from the house and the grape arbor were the farm buildings. A barn, a corn crib, a wagon shed, and the springhouse were on this level area at the foot of the hill. Water from the spring was carried up the hill to supply the family's needs. Flat fieldstones formed a path of steps.

Four years after the marriage of Creighton and Edna, a daughter, Thelma, was born. In her 92nd year, she still recalls vividly her one most precious memory of her father.

She remembers Charlie, the rough old farm horse whose erratic movements frightened her mother. When her father returned from a hard day's work in the fields, she and her mother would watch from the window for him and the faithful horse to arrive at the old gate at the foot of the hill below the house. Her mother was always fearful that Charlie would turn too mean and frisky for the little four-year-old to ride. But Creighton knew otherwise. At a given signal from her mother, she would run with abandon down the old flagstone path to meet her father who waited with open arms at the gate. Creighton would speak gently to Charlie as he placed the tiny girl on his back. Charlie would walk softly and slowly from the gate to the barn sensing his precious load. "Walk carefully, " her father would tell Charlie as he gave the horse a gentle pat. "Remember, you have the baby." Thelma would not trade that memory for anything this world could offer.

There is little else that she remembers of this young father whom she adored, for fate had other plans in store.

In the latter part of 1914, when little Thelma was four years of age, her father, Creighton, became seriously ill. By 2 February 1915, he was taken to Gill Hospital in Steubenville, Ohio, where Pittsburgh's best specialists failed to curb his all-consuming illness. On February tenth, he asked to be taken to his father's home in Wellsburg, where he died the next evening at 7:00 p.m. of lymphatic leukemia.

Thomas, Creighton's father, had remained a widower for 29 years after the death of his young wife, Sarah, in 1880. He had raised his small son there on the old Pettibon homestead where he, himself, had been born and raised. It was not until 1909, after Creighton had married and moved into the new home he had built on the farm, that Thomas had remarried - this time at the age of 68 - to a prominent, dearly loved, lady from the Wellsburg area, Anna Lazear. Anna was an educator in the public schools for forty years, an ardent worker in the Christian Church, and active in social circles of the area. She and Thomas lived out their lives in Wellsburg, he having left the old Pettibon homestead at the time of their marriage.

After Creighton's untimely death, Edna and little Thelma left the new house to spend her growing-up years moving haphazardly from relative to relative, searching, perhaps, for "home". But the farm of Creighton's ancestors on the road back in Jefferson Township had been home. And after his death, this young wife and child could not remain there alone. Thus it was that a place to really call "home", was to forever elude young Edna Pettibon. From her husband's passing in 1915 until her own death 65 years later in her 95th year, nothing ever came close to the life they had shared together back on the old Pettibon homestead on Bethel Ridge Road.

The old log house is gone. Those living today who are at all aware of its existence, know it only as "the little foundation." Anyone traveling the southern end of Bethel Ridge Road passes within fifteen feet of its front wall without sensing so much as a vibration. Although a man, his wife, and 13 children once called this location "home", voices that echoed then are now still. As is the house itself, gone also is its spirit.

Only partial walls of flat fieldstones that at one time formed the well-laid foundation are yet visible. Briars, brambles and persistent grasses work to choke out even these, but the intricate pattern of stones squaring off what was possibly the fruit cellar, still remains.

It is not known positively, but it is highly probable, that the first family here was that of William Pettibon. It is known, however, that the log house became "home" to a few others after the Pettibons left it. A group of bachelors who worked the Wabash Railroad lived there and claimed the house was "haunted."

In the mid 1930's, Mrs. Fay Clouston, having lost her husband in the coal mine, moved into the log house with her son, Raymond Boso. Raymond recalls many details about life in the log house when he lived there with his mother and his sisters.

When they arrived in the area, the only other buildings were the chicken house and an outhouse. Their only livestock were a flock of chickens and a pet pig.

Drinking water was obtained from a small stream below the house. After digging a small hole, the water came in so it could be dipped with the bucket. But after one bucket, the water was muddy. Water for washing clothes was caught in barrels on rainy days.

“We were poor, but we didn't know it, so we were happy,” Raymond says today.

While part of the family lived in the log house, Raymond's grandparents, Margaret and William Clouston, lived in the farmhouse. His grandmother milked the cows and ran the separator for obtaining the cream, which was hauled to Avella and sold. The farmhouse was also the home of Raymond's Uncle Herman Clouston and his family.

During his years in the Pettibon log house, Raymond attended Turney School and recalls A.D. White as principal. He walked the old Locust Road past the original location of Millers School on his way to Turney. This school stood on the line between William Pettibon and George Miller. It had closed in 1922 and the building was used to store hay and grain for the Miller farm animals. Before its closing by the township, this old road was used as a route for shopping or visiting in Avella.

No one is exactly certain when the old log house disappeared. Raymond recalls that his uncle, Herman Clouston, sold it to a lumber company which sawed the logs into lumber. This may have been in the early 1940s when lumber was very scarce due to the war effort.

As has been stated, the farmhouse built by Creighton Pettibon about 1900 is still standing. Several families have owned and occupied the farmhouse since the days of the honeymooning Pettibons. Among them were the Chilensky and the Strho families. It is presently owned by Jerry and Linda Rigo McNeely who raised their family there and greatly remodeled the house.

Although the log house where William Pettibon first established a homestead in the 1830s is gone forever, the essence of his life is safe and sound. This is evidenced through hundreds of his descendants who today still carry his blood line in their veins. Unfortunately, most of these descendants are totally unaware of even the names of their ancestors, not to mention the place where they lived or the trials and hardships they endured. Sadder yet is the unmistakable fact that most of them do not care.

Thomas was the last of the Pettibons to live in the old log house. A bona fide genealogist would most certainly assert that Thelma Pettibon Potts is the last of Thomas's line. When she grew to young womanhood, she fell in love with a man named Bernard Potts and married him. To them was born a son, Raymond Potts, who died in the 1990s. In 1963, Raymond had married Betty Jean Buckley. No children were born to this couple, but out of a desire to make a real home for themselves, they adopted two children, whom they named Stephen and Theresa. Thelma is quite aware that these “grandchildren” and “great-grandchildren” of hers are, as one genealogist put it, “Pettibons by proxy”. Yet listening to her tales of her encounters with them and with her daughter-in-law, Betty Jean, one is struck by the depth of the affection they feel for each other. Perhaps this situation is evidence of a universal truth which most people will not grasp until much farther along in their evolution toward the light – namely, that the genes we carry in our cells may not be nearly so important as the love we carry in our hearts.