

More than a century of the History of Oley, Trappe, Douglassville, Coventryville, Pottstown and Boyertown are represented in this collection. They are the intimate tales of our ancestors selected from those appearing three times a week in the Pottstown Mercury over the past two years.

It is hoped that another collection bearing upon the Revolutionary War period may be prepared at a later date approaching our Bi-Centennial year.

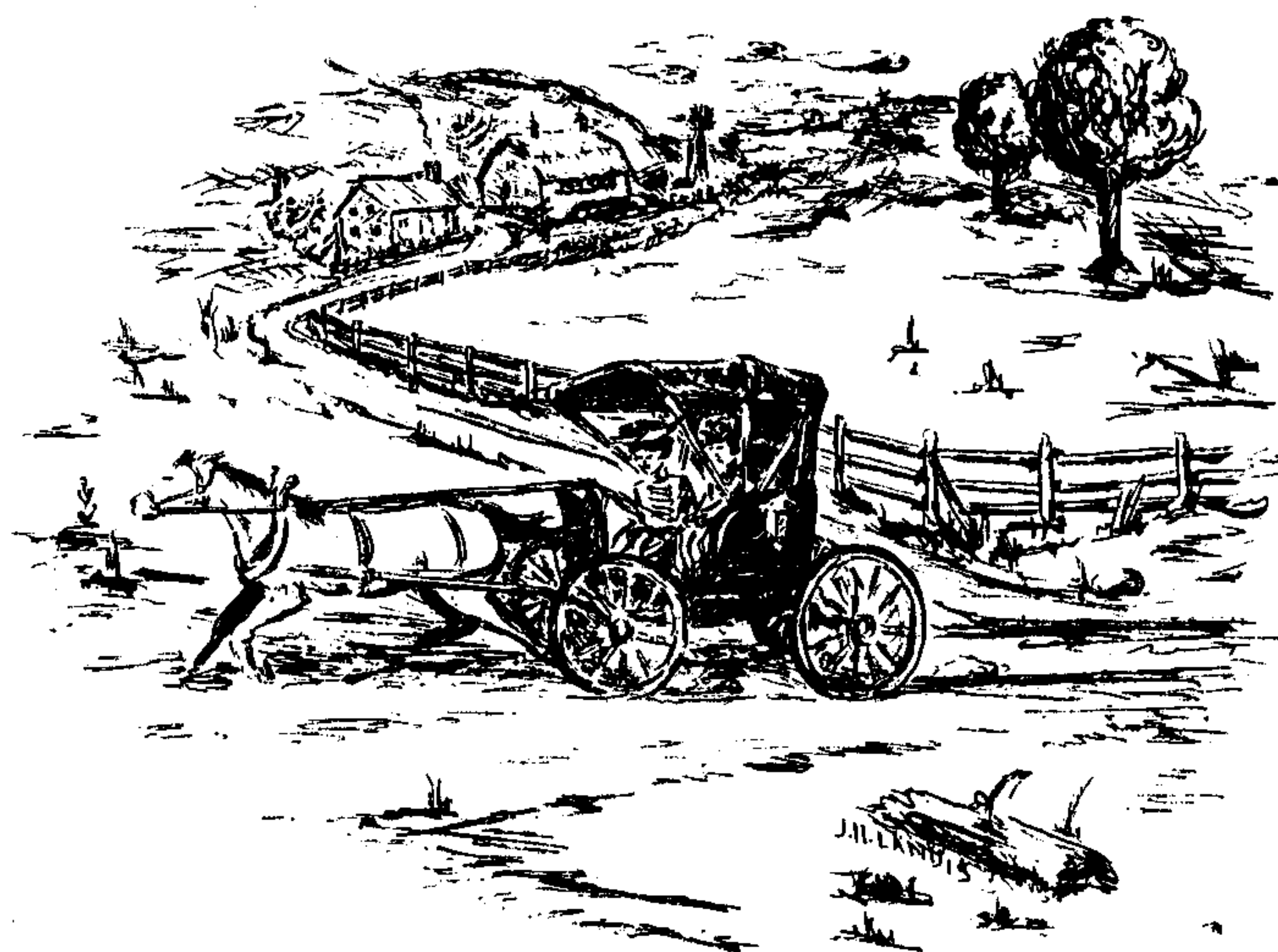
This book is dedicated to all those families of this Pottstown Area who are the Custodians of a Heritage of Faith and Freedom and human achievement that is Great in American History.

— Cultural Arts Committee

Front Cover — Mistaken Identity, page 164

Journey Through Our Land

by W. Edmunds Claussen



*SIXTY EDITORIAL-PAGE COLUMNS
from the POTTSTOWN MERCURY*

Cultural Arts Committee
Greater Pottstown Area Chamber of Commerce
Pottstown, Pennsylvania
1970

STORIES TOLD OF MEN REARED IN POTTS GROVE

Captain Diemer and his Bear, page 56



Copyright 1970 by
CULTURAL ARTS COMMITTEE
GREATER POTTS TOWN AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
POTTS TOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Printed by MAHR PRINTING, INC.
Pottstown, Pa.

We who have enjoyed the warm and wholesome mansion of Pottsgrove, who have seen the glow of its soft candlelight upon its fine furniture, have felt so often we knew so little of those children who came to maturity, outgrowing the "children's dining room" of that old mansion.

A letter from Dr. Jonathan Potts dated "Jan. 5th, 1777, on the Field of Action near Princeton," and addressed to Owen Biddle of the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety, reports the death of Anthony Morris, a brother of Samuel Morris:

My D'r Friend, Tho' the Acc't I send is a melancholy one (in one respect), yet I have sent an Express to give you the best information I can collect. Our mutual friend, Anthony Morris, died here, in three hours after he received his wounds on Friday morning. They were three in number, one on his chin, one on the knee, and the third and fatal one on the right temple, by grape shot. Brave man! He fought and died nobly, deserving a much better fate . . . Your most humble Servant, Jon'n Potts."

Dr. Potts saw the field of action at Princeton. Later he worked upon that field following the battle.

We have spoken before about Isaac the miller, whose likeness has been recreated in the old etchings of Washington praying in the snows of Valley Forge. For Isaac it was who overheard the faint voice from amid the bushes and, dismounting, strode to investigate. These were the cruelest days of winter for the troops, and as Isaac watched, spellbound, tears glistened upon General Washington's cheeks.

There is a story of Isaac Potts preaching the Friends' funeral service to Washington in Philadelphia that we have not yet told. It is written of Isaac that he had not known of the death of General Washington until he entered the meeting house at Second and Market streets. Then someone whispered the story to him, and he walked up the aisle very much sobered.

He rose amid the silent meeting and began his testimony. His voice seemed husky and not his own to his ears. His mind

school land, " for "digging foundations," for supplying hinges, spikes, boards, shingles, etc. Under date of January 6, 1816: "By money in the Treasury if all subscribers pay, 3 pounds, 18s, 9d." It is not known who was first schoolmaster, but others were: Ihmhoff, Jamison, Bobb, Alexander Koriff, Peter Grim, Abraham Shelly, George Kern, Jacob Harple, Adam Slemmer, Benjamin Schneider, Rebecca M. Dechant, Ephraim A. Schwenk — I am sorry we cannot print them all.

The teacher, when a man of family, occupied the dwelling and generally kept a cow. Adjoining the school lot, on the northeastern side was the wagon house of Judge Markley, with open front, in which, particularly on rainy days, the youngsters delighted to play. In it was a large, hollow bomb-shell, which the boys were wont to try to lift; this was probably a relic of the Revolutionary war.

JOSEPH BAILEY, IRONMASTER

A peculiar phenomenon commenced when Joseph Bailey drove over from Westtown. The Baileys altered much about our iron communities, and yet succeeded, without attempting to do so, in perpetuating certain basic concepts of Pennsylvania life as laid down in the 1720s by Thomas Rutter and Thomas Potts.

All three of these families were responsible for an attitude in the relationship of mankind that has not yet completely vanished from our region.

Bailey tooled his team up the Manatawny road to Pine Forge during March, 1844. He drew his horses to a halt in the stableyard of Pine, looked about curiously at what he saw. Word had drifted across the Schuylkill that the old iron property might be bought at a low price.

For some years the forge had lain idle, and there must have been other visible neglect, yet Bailey liked what he saw for he dug into his pocket and came up with an offer of \$16,000 for the package deal. It was accepted on the spot. He received 352 acres mostly of prime land, the orchard begun by David Potts prior to the Revolution, a saw mill, ancient cool-house and various lesser buildings. The main house in out-

er appearance probably possessed its classic lines of today. The third or smaller wing could by this time have been added by John Potts Rutter.

Within, a great hall led to spacious parlor and library on the left, the dining hall lay to the right, with kitchen and pantry facilities in the wing David Rutter had added. Great trees planted by the first ironmasters still graced the yard. In the rear overlooking the Manatawny was the two-story counting house with its iron-barred windows, the accounting rooms where young David of Popodickon had mastered the secrets of iron manufacturing profit, and where he doodled with quill pen over ledgers still preserved in the vaults of the Pine Forge Academy.

The walks and gardens were lined with boxwood neatly trimmed, and wooden arbors constructed over the walks supported clematis and honeysuckle. When the weather was clement the women of the family and their friends arriving in carriages sewed and talked in the walled herb garden attached to the southern portion of the house.

The availability of ready cash made it possible for the Baileys to take possession by the first week in April. That year of 1844 Joseph Bailey spent improving the manor house. It is claimed he also rebuilt the grist mill that now bears his name.

The next year Bailey spent rebuilding the damhead and tearing down the original forge building. In its place he built a rolling mill of 800 ton yearly capacity for the manufacture of iron plate. The new plant stood beside the Manatawny and derived its power from a huge wheel, as had Rutter's initial forge which probably had occupied the precise same ground.

Unlike Rutter and Potts who came so early into a virgin frontier, there survive contemporary descriptions of Bailey. He was said to have been of purest Quaker lineage, being descendant from Thomas Bailey arriving at approximately the time of Penn, Rutter, Potts, Anthony Morris and George Mifflin. The Bailey of 1844 must have looked the part, with widest-of-brim fur hat, drab colored suit of finest cloth. He was clean shaven at a time when men were considered naked without beard, and he had an engaging manner. Cyrus T. Fox, knowing Bailey during his youth, was struck by the ironmaster's "astute discern-

ment and correct principles."

The iron that Pine Forge produced had always been considered of superior quality. The very fact of Pine's longevity stood as proof of its product. As the Civil War years approached new changes came to the ironwork. About this time Bailey's son, Joseph L. Bailey, began an active interest in the business. Boiler plate for Civil War locomotives was now being produced. Joseph L. Bailey's obvious interest in locomotives ran beyond the manufacture of their iron plates, for by 1865 he lent his support to the drafting of a petition to the General Assembly for the establishment of a railroad from the main track at Pottstown to Barto and perhaps beyond. An earlier attempt at such a railroad had died on the vine, but with young Bailey's enthusiasm, and with the assistance of the Philadelphia and Reading Company Governor A. C. Curtin on March 23, 1865 approved. A great day for the farms, mines and ironworks along the right-of-way. When the road was completed, 1869, Joseph L. was its first active president. He held the position of president of the Colebrookdale Railroad until his death, a total of nearly 39 years.

Meantime the ironwork at the old Douglassville ford of the Manatawny increased its capacity to 2,800 tons annually. Joseph L. Bailey by now was at the helm with his brother-in-law, Comly Bird Shoemaker, another devout Quaker, as partner. A fine story written in the diary of Elizabeth Whitacre recalls how one of the workers, Frank Swavely, was not especially careful about choosing his language one night when nothing appeared to be going to his liking. Finally Frank went to some pains in expressing how he felt. In the dead silence that followed he suddenly became aware of a man standing at his elbow. It was Comly Shoemaker, looking a bit crestfallen.

"Frank, thou doest not have to speak so loudly to the Lord. He will hear thee anyhow," Comly said softly. Miss Whitacre noted that Frank Swavely took to religion after this brief brush with sulphur and brimstone.

A similar tale is told to this day of Joseph L. Bailey. The old Quaker heard his horse cry out one night in bad fright. Into the gloomy stable he rushed to find a new hand in the act of punishing his horse. Bailey glared at the man.

"Thee knows I cannot strike thee," he said, red of face.

"But if thee continues with what thee is about I shall shake thee hard!"

These are the men who fill in a substantial portion of our background, whose philosophy of life to at least some degree has channeled the flow of our own lives.

BAILEY'S CHILDREN CONTINUED TRADITION

In speaking of Bailey's children every man, woman and child who lived within sight and sound of his rolling mill on the Manatawny must be included. For Joseph Bailey and the Baileys that followed were a breed of men no longer with us. They continued the tradition of the iron plantation of colonial days, feeling a deep personal involvement in the prosperity of all whose paths they crossed.

It has been fondly recalled of Joseph L. Bailey that he held the welfare of the village of Pine so closely to heart that every family received its yearly reading matter through his generosity; the Christian Weekly for adults, the Youth's Companion for adolescents and The Nursery for the small tots.

A children's library was maintained in the company office on the terrace beyond the mule barn. The books have been rated as not of the most exciting — but these were for the young, and their moral tone was for a purpose. The foundation stones of this old building are yet to be found during Winter months when the tall grasses have died off. The mule barn is still standing and is used as "the print shop" by the Pine Forge Academy. The roof of the old milk house came down under last winter's heavy snows, but its walls still stand farther along the terrace. When the Seventh-Day Adventists first founded their Academy they used this building as their chapel.

In those long ago days of the rolling mill the present village did not exist. A quarter mile upstream from the village of today, and clustered about the upper bridge and the ruins of Bailey's grist mill, are a few of the remaining houses that Bailey's people knew as the settlement of Pine. It had its own Post Office, its own pulse of life, its own culture. Every election day the Dearborn carriage of the ironmaster went out

in charge of the Bailey carriageman, stopping at each house to make certain one and all — Republican or Democrat — went to the poling place. It is remembered today how the Bailey custom was to issue their paycheck on Monday of each week. It was hoped by this practice to insure enough cash to last each family the week through, for Saturday was a big night at the village tavern and Bailey hoped to see the women and children derive the most good from his paychecks.

The diary of Elizabeth Whitacre presents a colorful word picture of life at the Pine Iron Work: "I can almost hear the rapid beat of the rolls as a new heat was announced by the taps on the plate that served as a gong, and see the activity of the men as they fell to work. The most musical beating of the gong took place at night when the mill changed hands. A long steady beating that ran up and down the village and over the hills and farms.

"I remember John Mowdy's tall thin body as he stood over the rolls and watched the scale of pressure to be used in reducing the heated blooms to the right thinness for a boiler plate, the swing of the crane as it brought the white hot bloom from the furnace, the splash of sparkles as the bloom struck the rolls. There was a charm to me in watching the muscular actions of the men who pushed the elongating plate between the rolls, then received it again. Finally with a lazy thrust, the long, finished plate was drawn out and fell with a loud thud to the floor.

"The men who worked in the mill and occupied the houses were sturdy characters. There was Daniel Rhoads, the blacksmith. A decided man in spite of the fact that at times he indulged in liquor. Jakie Boughter Zimmerman, John Mowdy, Frank Swavely, the Whitacres father and two sons, and others. There were the two gardners, Frank Thompson and Natty Rhoads, a most likable and trustworthy man who took care of the Bailey gardens. . . "

Another of the men working at the grist mill was an ex-officer of the Civil War. A man obviously suffering some disorder to his nervous system, for perhaps his whole structure demanded alcohol and whenever that happened all the horrors of the battlefield returned and he would charge through the mill with a great racket thrashing about with a pitchfork and

yelling into the unfriendly shadows. One can only imagine the consternation he must have brought to the sensitive Joseph L. Bailey.

In 1882 Bailey brought additional land from Mahlon H. Focht and removed his entire operation beside the new railroad tracks. Here the village of Pine Forge was born at this seat of industry. The reconstructed mill, operated by steam power, now had an increased capacity of 4000 tons. Before completion its superintendent, Joseph Whitacre, dropped dead from a heart attack. Levi G. Thomas replaced him in the new organization.

According to the early Douglass Township tax book at the turn of the century a tax allowance of \$7.50 was deductible by firms maintaining watering troughs, but the overflow during Winter months created a constant icy roadway on the sharp rise from the Manatawny. Crossing the creek a little above stream-level one entered the dark mouth of a long and graceful covered bridge. If one hit the entrance sideways in the ice one was sure to suffer damage.

For some peculiar reason provision was never made to care for the excess water, thus so much unfavorable comment resulted from this roadway toboggan that Frank R. Mowdy, tax collector, requested the plant to discontinue its public service. Unfortunately, by Summertime, Mowdy now found he had created an even more vexing problem among the horsey traveling set whose beasts demanded water.

A letter from the files of the old ironworks speaks eloquently of those long-ago days:

7th mo. 29, 1905

Mr. James Bailey:

I have been renting a typewriter as an experiment, for which I have paid personally. While not a necessity I find it a great time saver and convenience. Do you think it would be asking too much for the Company to purchase one?

J. A. Whitacre, (Superintendent)