

Our Conococheague Settlement

1732 - 1782

By Sidney Nill

CONOCOCHEAQUE DISTRICT
Chambersburg, Pa.

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Our Conococheague Settlement

By SIDNEY NILL

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Daughters of the American Revolution.

When the Cumberland Valley, located in what is now Cumberland and Franklin counties, was part of Lancaster County (formed in 1729) it was divided and townships erected. In 1735, the valley was separated into two townships and the division line was about the same as now divides the counties of Cumberland and Franklin. At that time the land was in the possession and ownership of the Indians. The treaty with the Five Nations at Philadelphia, by which the proprietors of the province became the owners of the soil here, took place October 11, 1736. The court of quarter sessions of Lancaster County, at the November session of 1735, divided the valley into two townships, Pennsborough and Hopewell, the former embracing what is now Cumberland County and the latter what is now Franklin County, except the territory in the townships — Fannett, Metal and Warren. The division line between the two townships crossed the valley about where Newville now is — then or soon afterward known as the "Big Springs." From this place to the Maryland line was for a time Hopewell Township, Lancaster county.

At the May term, 1741, of the quarter sessions court of Lancaster, "upon application of the inhabitants of the township" (of the western portion of Hopewell) presented by Richard Cain, Esq., the order of the court erecting Antrim Township was made and the name indicates where the early settlers came from — "Mother Antrim" in Ireland — who

sent of her best and bravest to this new country where they penetrated to the frontier settlement, hewed the dark old woods away and contributed largely toward building our Great Republic.

Our pioneers were James Johnston, Jacob Snively, Joseph Crunkleton, George Gordon, James Roddy, Thomas Brown, John Kennedy, and others, who came before the year 1735. This community was known as the East Conococheague Settlement.

The lands in our Kittochtinny, later Cumberland Valley, were purchased from the Indians in October 1736 but several years before that time the agents of the Proprietor, knowing the feelings of the Indians to be favorable, encouraged settlers to come and issued to them special licenses for the settlement and securing of such tracts of land beyond the Susquehanna as they might choose. Licenses were given to our settlers in 1734, by Thomas Blunston, the agent of the proprietors in advance of the extinguishment of the Indian title to the land. The first of these licenses was dated January 24, 1734, the last October 31, 1737.

There were many Indians in the valley at this time. The Shawanese were probably the principal ones. Many of them had come from the west and south and settled here under the protection of the Delawares, and through them, in a kind of subordination, to the Six Nations. Among them were individuals belonging to the Delawares or the Six Nations. Hence we often read of

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Susquehannas and Nanticokes, Mingoies and Tuteloes, the two last belonging to the Six Nations.

The places selected for homes and churches by the first comers were generally in the neighborhood of one of the beautiful springs so numerous in the valley. The first buildings were of the simplest kind.

Jacob Snively, it is said, built his log cabin in 1734 near the site of the stone mansion built by his son Andrew forty-seven years later. The floors of these log cabins were not made of sawed and planed boards, but of split wood and hewed, with a roof of rude shingles, thatched straw or the bark of trees. Their chairs were benches, their tables of the rudest kind and the table ware consisted of a few pewter dishes, plates and spoons. Of course, at this time, everything from a distance had to be carried on the backs of horses and over the Susquehanna by the simplest canoes or boats, so they could not have more than the necessities of life.

James Johnston settled north of what is now Shady Grove. His original warrant from Thomas Penn is dated February 18, 1737, in Hopewell Township, Lancaster County. Joseph Crunkleton settled two miles east of what is now Greencastle and Jacob Snively and George Gordon also located east of town. Jacob Snively received a warrant bearing date March 28, 1743, from Thomas and Richard Penn. He became a large landholder and evidently had much business ability, as he acted for sometime as collector of taxes and agent for the Penns. Thomas Brown's location is remembered by the settlement which still bears his name — Brown's Mill. James Roddy occupied the land northeast of town, between the town and the Conococheague Creek, and John Kennedy established himself southwest of and west branches of the creek. The town at the confluence of the east latter obtained his tract of

land from an old Indian Chief, Cornplanter, with whom he lived in friendship for a quarter of a century. John Kennedy tried to establish a village but failed to do so. David, son of John, inherited the land and became a boat man on the creek between the confluence and the Potomac at Georgetown and Alexandria. Kennedy's plantation on the Conococheague was a port of shipment and flat boats carried freight down and up the creek and the Potomac to tide water.

The Conococheague Settlement was of rapid growth and the nucleus of the settlement from the beginning was a Presbyterian Church. This first church was built of logs, as early as 1738, and stood near Moss Spring. All Presbyterians for miles around, as far east as the top of South Mountain, wended their way to it on the Sabbath. Whole families made the journey on horseback, carrying the smaller children in saddle pockets or panniers thrown across the backs of horses. The men always carried their weapons to protect themselves if surprised by a lurking band of Indians.

It is supposed the log church was either destroyed by the Indians or had fallen into such bad repair as to be unfit to occupy and that encouraged by the presence of a pastor, the Rev. James Lang, who came between 1750-67, and the return of peace at the close of the French and Indian War, the congregation set to work to build a new church at Moss Spring, near the land of William Rankin. One of the young men of the congregation has left us this description of it: "The old Meeting House stood at the northern end of the graveyard, the ground gently sloping from it to the spring bubbling forth a few rods below. It was built after the fashion of most of the churches of that period, a one-story frame building 42½ by 28½, weatherboarded and painted red. The inside was sealed and lined with

boards. There was a broad aisle running across the building just in front of the pulpit, which stood upon a pedestal at the middle of the north side of the house. From this aisle, which communicated at each end with a door, ran at right angles two other aisles, leading to the front side of the building, each of these also connecting with a door. The pews were arranged on either side of these latter aisles, with some on each side of the pulpit, which gradually raised in height from the pulpit to the wall, so that the wall seat was on a level with the floor of the pulpit, and above the heads of most of the congregation. During the pastorate of the Rev. Robert Kennedy, for want of sufficient room an addition 12 feet wide was made to the front. The pulpit was old fashioned and rough, of a circular form and extending some feet from the wall; above it was an oval-shaped sounding board. There was a broad place in front of the pulpit and between it and the pews 'here stood the pious clerk, well formed and sober faced, with whose pitch all peoples voice did go.' "

The first session of the church of which we have any knowledge included the following: Joseph Smith, John Allison, Elias Davison Sr., Andrew Robinson Sr., and James McLain. Their successors in office were Robert Crunkleton, Robert Robinson, John M. Davidson, John Watson and Mr. Kellar.

A small rough log building about 12 or 15 feet square, with a large chimney in one end, stood some 30 yards east of the church, and was called the study house. These buildings were very often used as a receptacle for the saddles of the congregation in rainy weather, as in those days the people generally came to church on horseback. The church session also met here and the minister used the little building in preparing for the service while the people, lunch in

hand, would gather around the spring and drink of its clear sparkling water or stroll among the rocks and trees of the surrounding grove.

In that same old study house there was, during the pastorate of Rev. Kennedy, a classical school, taught by John Boreland, one of the finest scholars and most admirable teachers in the country, in which a number of young men received their training, who afterwards attained eminence in their several walks of life. Among these were — John X. Clark, Matthew St-Clair Clark, Thomas G. McCollough, Dr. John Boggs, and Rev. John Lind.

For the first twenty years there was peace in the Conococheague Settlement, the Indians were friendly, but from 1752 to 1764, especially about the time of Braddock's defeat, 1755-57, there was desperate fighting. One of the last and most revolting massacres was that of the teacher, Enoch Brown, and his school children which occurred on July 26, '64.

As early as 1744 block houses were built for protection from the attacks of Indians. Fort Allison was erected at the William Allison homestead, south of town, another at Kisecker's Mill, and Fort Stauffer about five miles northeast of Greencastle, the date of erection being 1754, and the builder the Rev. William Stauffer, a German Baptist who came to this country from Switzerland.

Our outstanding Indian fighters at this time were Captain James Smith with his "black boys" and Captain (Rev.) John Steele and his company who came to church, guns in hand.

After 1764 there was peace until the outbreak of the Revolution. In 1772, George Brown, son of the pioneer Thomas Brown, built a grist mill at the junction of the branches of Muddy Run. It was of stone, operated by water power from both branches of the Run. This mill gave the community its name; before that

(1772) it was included in the East Conococheague Settlement, and besides keeping its patrons supplied with material for making bread and processing the farmers grain for profitable sale in other markets "it was the pivot point in the civic solidarity in this section." The mill, unfortunately for the community, burned down. Their fort stood on the north side of the Five Forks road, between the cemetery and Muddy Run. It was a private fortification built of stone and about 14 feet square. one in the chain of forts erected on the east side of the Alleghany mountains, about 1755, extending from the junction of the branches of the Susquehanna (Fort Augusta) to the Maryland Line (Fort Davis) to defend the frontier against depredation by the Indians after Braddock's defeat (1755) and during the Pontiac War (1763-6). The fort probably saved the Brown's Mill community from attack at the time of the Enoch Brown tragedy (July 24, 1764). That same day a party of Indians attacked the Kennedy settlement. The first school built in the township was the Enoch Brown School. After the massacre the schools were held in the various homes; later, in 1789, a school was built of logs - a small square building that stood between the large oaks in front of the present consolidated building.

There are said to be at least twenty large, well constructed stone houses within two miles from Brown's Mill which our early settlers built for their homes to take the place of the log structures of pioneer days. The one best known to us as the old Knauff man home was built in 1767 by Humphrey Fullerton, who called it "The Castle" because originally he intended to model it after an old English Castle, which was to be twice as large as it is now. This stone house has a fine handcarved wooden cornice running under the roof. Inside there is

a broad hall with stairway running to the third floor, the balustrade having a mahogany hand rail and delicate balusters. Opening on this hall are double parlors on one side and a succession of rooms opening into one another on the other side. Most of the rooms have open fire places with carved mantles, chair boards and deep window sills. Outside are many old trees and a fine spring where in the early days there was a stockade, a retreat from Indian massacres. Besides being a very large land owner, Mr. Fullerton was also a great builder in his day, having erected several large stone houses on his tract of land stretching from Brown's Mill to Muddy Run and including the present house on the Chambers farm. In the early days County Courts were held by such justices of the Peace of the county as were specially commissioned to act as Judges of said courts. Humphrey Fullerton and Thomas Johnston, of Antrim Township, were qualified as two of these judges who held the first court in this county September 15, 1784.

The date of the erection of the stone mansion built by Thomas Poe is unknown. The south wing was probably built by him and the house completed by his son, Captain James Poe. It is a house said to be of the type common among the gentry in Ulster and often reproduced in Pennsylvania by Irish emigrants in the 18th century. The main part of the building is a square structure, two stories in height, with a wing on the south of only a story and a half. In the early days there was an imposing front on the northwest side of the house facing the Conococheague. At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, James Poe was a lieutenant in Col. John Allison's battalion of Pennsylvania Militia. He was also a captain in Col. Smith's battalion 1777-78-82. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Gen. James

Potter. The Poe house is two miles west of Kauffman's Station.

Near the old Brown's Mill graveyard was the Potter house, a story and a half in height, of limestone, rudely dressed, built about 1746, by John Potter, first sheriff of Cumberland County. This was his home at the outbreak of the French and Indian War and a refuge for many of his neighbors fleeing for safety from Indian attacks. At his death his eldest son James made the house his home until 1767 when he moved to Penn's Valley, in what is now Centre county. It was James who led the settlers in the pursuit of the Indians after the Enoch Brown massacre and was later appointed Colonel Pennsylvania Militia 1776-77; Brigadier General April 5, 1777; Major General May 23, 1782, serving until close of war. He was also vice president of the state in 1781. He married Elizabeth Cathcart.

One of our historians says, "The Old Conococheague Settlement seemed to present a peculiar attraction as a point of settlement for a class of superior men. In this section a ruling spirit and a recognized leader was one James McLene." Born in New London, Chester County, and educated at a classical academy under the charge of the Rev. Francis Allison, a man of scholarly attainments, he came to the Conococheague Settlement in 1753, at the age of twenty-three, married Christina Brown and took up a valuable tract of land. There he established his home, Mount Pleasant, a fine, large old brick house above Clay Hill, which has been owned for three generations by the Gsell family. These old houses of the Conococheague Settlement are very much alike in construction. Through a heavy door with the old black locks and long hinges one enters a wide hall with easy mounting stairway. There are big fireplaces in the rooms, many carved mantels, cupboards,

chairboards and deep windows. In the McLene house the windows are unchanged, each window having twenty panes of glass.

James McLene was a member of the Carpenter's Hall Conference, was elected to the Constitutional Conventions of 1776 and 1789, represented Pennsylvania for a term in the Continental Congress, served repeatedly as a member of the Supreme Executive Council of the state and for four terms was a member of the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania.

Colonel Abraham Smith also stands out conspicuous in early times. He was lieutenant of the county, a number of times a member of the legislature, served in the supreme executive council of the state, in the Constitutional Convention in 1789, and for two terms in the state Senate in the years immediately following its adoption.

During the Revolutionary War the 8th battalion was commanded by Abraham Smith and its officers were largely taken from one family, the sons of James Johnston. The eldest son, James, was lieutenant-colonel of the 8th battalion, Cumberland County Associators, 1777-80, and upon the reorganization of the militia in 1780 became Lieutenant-Colonel commanding the 1st battalion of the Associators. He was a member of the Pennsylvania Legislature 1784-85 and 1788-93. He inherited the old stone house of his father, James Johnston, near Shady Grove, for many years the property of the Fricks, and married Jane Park.

The stone house erected by Thomas Johnston in 1765 stands near that of his father and brother James and is a good specimen of the houses of that period. The entrance hall is wide and the large parlor has all the original carved wood panelling; the dining room opposite drops to a lower level

than the parlor. Thomas was adjutant of Colonel Abraham Smith's battalion and upon the reorganization in 1780 became a captain. He was in service under General Wayne and was in the disastrous action at Paoli Sept. 20, 1777. He was appointed Lieutenant-Colonel of 2nd battalion, Pennsylvania Militia for the county of Franklin May 1, 1786, and Lieutenant-Colonel of the 1st battalion in 1792. He represented Franklin County in the State Senate 1794-1803, succeeding Colonel Abraham Smith. His wife was Martha Beatty, daughter of James Beatty. John Johnston was Major of Colonel Abraham Smith's battalion.

Dr. W. H. Egle, former state historian, says Robert Johnston was appointed surgeon of the 6th Pennsylvania Battalion, Colonel William Irvine. January 16, 1776, and continued in service until 1781, when he was ordered by the Commander-in-Chief to leave the regimental service and assist the wounded officers and soldiers of the American Army, prisoners in the British hospital at Charleston, South Carolina. He was a member of the Society of the Cincinnati and retained the friendship of his fellow officers during life, many of whom sought his medical advice and skill long after his professional retirement.

After the Revolution Dr. Johnston made a voyage to China with a cargo of ginseng from which he realized a fortune and at the same time gained vast stores of general information. It is said a civil appointment was given to him in China by President Washington. He was later appointed United States Revenue Collector by President Jefferson. Dr. Johnston married Eleanor Pawling, and a couple of miles south of Greencastle, on the King's Highway, was the original substantial stone house where they lived, a half mile beyond it is the larger house he

built at a later time — which is best known to us. It originally had a large entrance hall with an unusually wide and imposing Colonial stairway; the rooms were very large with the usual chimney fireplaces and carved mantels, upstairs as well as down, but the mantels some years ago were taken out and sold, and the stairway, also, was torn out. Only the exterior of the house remains as it was in Dr. Johnston's time, with the "All Seeing Eye" in the glass transom above the front door, an emblem of the Masonic order of which Dr. Johnston was a member.

Among the early settlers was James McLanahan who came from Ireland to this country about 1737 and obtained a warrant for a large tract of land, July 5, 1742, and died in 1777, leaving two sons, James and John. James McLanahan, the eldest son, was born in 1735, served in the Revolutionary War, and died August 17, 1823. He was married to Isabella Craig of Cecil county, Maryland. John also served in the Revolutionary War and married Rebecca Agnew. Their old stone houses are located in a section of the county called "The Marsh," from its topographical peculiarities.

Another family at that time were the Mitchells. From a record of early land titles is that of John Mitchell for a tract of land, March 21, 1737. The mansion house, now the home of Miss Olive Shook and Mrs. Champion, was probably built by his son James about 1780. James Mitchell married Mary Steele, daughter of the Rev. (Captain) John Steele.

To the Walnut Hills district near Marion came William Davison in 1755, from York county, and bought a large tract of land from Colonel Benjamin Chambers. In his will dated September 1770, he gave the Sellers farm to his eldest son John and to his son Joseph, born in 1750, the Mansion farm. The one-story end of the house was built

by William, the father, about the time he bought the land and was originally a log cabin, later weatherboarded and still later the stone front added; the large two story part was built by Joseph about forty years later. All is of stone in a fine state of preservation, having original locks and hinges on the old home-made doors. Joseph is listed with our soldiers of the Revolution buried in Moss Spring graveyard (1842) with his wife Margaret (Brown) Davison and a second wife, Margaret (Robinson) Davison.

John Davison, a brother of William, was an Indian interpreter and served with George Washington in 1753, when he was sent north to Fort Le Boeuf and Venango by Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia to protest against the encroachments of the French. A detailed account of the expedition may be found on page 566 of *Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania*, Vol. II. Other good stone houses in the vicinity of Brown's Mill are those of James Beatty, Rev. James Lang, *Frederick Byer, the Hades and a number with whose history we are not yet acquainted.

In the year 1772 John Crunkleton laid out a town about two miles east of the future Greencastle and named it Crunkleton. Lots were sold, three houses were built, one of which was kept as a tavern by George Clark and another as a store by John Lawrence. James Clark, one of the former Canal Commissioners of our state, passed his early years here. But the town failed to develop, two of the houses were removed and the street and the town plot merged into the farm of the late Benjamin Snively, the Crunkleton home becoming a part of the Snively house.

Near the site of the log house built by Jacob Snively in 1734 stands one in stone built by his son Andrew. In the gable end of the house is a stone slab with the letters A and S. S. 1781 cut in it — these letters stand for Andrew

and Sarah Snively who built this house in 1781. The house stands on a hill with a beautiful spring and many fine trees. There are arched doorways and heavy shuttered windows. In the parlor the mantel is beautifully carved as the wooden mantel breast and the window and door trim. There are arched fireplaces in the rooms upstairs as well as down. The builder, Mr. Andrew Snively, was a squire, also a soldier of the Revolution, and had his office in the house. The first election in Antrim Township was held here and the voters grew hilarious, a fight ensued and the panel of one of the doors was broken; this panel was called to our attention by the owner of the house, Mr. Zarger.

About one mile east of Shady Grove stands an old stone house on what is known as the Royer farm. This land belonged originally to Geo. Gordon who came here from Scotland in 1734 and died in 1759. Henry, his son, married Sarah Johnston and probably lived in what is now the back building of the present house, which was built by Alexander, son of Henry, after 1800. It is a well built house and the older part of it looks interesting.

On the east side of the King's Highway, south of town, stood a hostelry known as Pawling's Tavern which was on the route from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh and was considered the limit of safety for travelers; it is mentioned in Colonial documents as Pollen's Tavern as early as 1765. The proprietor was Henry Pawling (or Paulding) a relative of the Thomas Paulding who assisted in the capture of Major Andre as the latter was returning from his meeting with Benedict Arnold. Henry Pawling, a son, succeeded his father as host of the tavern. He served in the Revolutionary War in Capt. Berryhill's Company, Cumberland County Militia, 1776-81. In this locality was Henry Prather who, with Elias Davidson, before the French and Indian War, drove cattle

*Soldier of the Revolution

from the Cumberland Valley to Detroit.

On the road to Middleburg, two miles from Greencastle, stands the old stone house of the Allison's. The entrance hall is at least fifteen feet wide, with lofty double parlors opening out on it, the rooms upstairs and down being of fine proportions with the usual carved wooden mantels, cupboards and chairboards. In the early days a stockade was built over a portion of the spring where the family could retreat in case of sudden attack by the Indians, provisions and ammunition being stored here and water being at hand in case of a siege.

William Allison came from the north of Ireland to Lancaster county in the early part of the 18th century, before 1750. He had three sons, John, Patrick and William.

Patrick Allison graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1760 and studied for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. Dr. Samuel Smith, then president of Princeton College, describes him as the ablest statesman in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. He became the founder and for nearly forty years pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Baltimore, Md.

Colonel John Allison, the eldest son, was active in the cause of

Independence. At a meeting of citizens of Cumberland county in Carlisle, in June 1774, he was made a member of the Committee of Observation. Two years later in June 1776, he was a delegate to the Provincial Conference which met in Carpenters Hall in Philadelphia. He became Colonel of the 2nd Battalion of Cumberland County Associators and led them during the Jersey campaign of 1776-77. For the three succeeding years he was a member of the General Assembly of the state. In 1787 he was one of the delegates to the Convention to consider the proposed Constitution of the United States. Dr. Wm. H. Igle says, "No more patriotic servant to the state ever lived than Colonel Allison."

Another name associated with the men of that day is that of James Watson. He was Colonel of the 2nd battalion of Lancaster County, by commission dated July 1, 1777, a member of the Society of the Cincinnati, and came here at the close of the Revolutionary War, becoming our first Burgess.

With the names of the two last mentioned men before us, Colonel John Allison, founder of the town (1782) and Colonel James Watson, the first Burgess, "Conococheague" fades out of the picture and we are - in Greencastle.

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