

Jackson Township

Cambria County, Pennsylvania



Chapter 17

Annals of Jackson Township

Mrs. Betty Burkhart
Nanty Glo Journal
August 6, 1942

Communities And Their First Settlers (Continued)

Burkhart's Crossing

Burkhart's Crossing was named when the Southern Cambria railroad was first built and was called that in honor of Daniel Burkhart thru whose farm the right-of-way ran. Daniel, who was a son of Joseph Burkhart lived in his later years on the former Henry Ely farm. Lewis Burkhart, a son of Daniel, still lives on the old farm.

Henry Ely was a man who was outstanding in many ways and is still remembered by the older settlers. He was something of a wit and many of his stories and also interesting details of his own character are still remembered and repeated. He taught school in the township schools for sixty years (that feat alone would make him outstanding), and was the first superintendent of schools of Cambria county. Mr. Ely was of Scotch decent and came here from Boston when he was quite young. He married Mary Wilson of Johnstown and they were the parents of four children, Mary (Ely) Stewart, Maud (Ely) Paul, Elizabeth (Ely) Russell, and Alice (Ely) Goodroe. He was the grandfather of Mrs. W. T. Wilson of near the airport.

In this community sixty years ago Henry Ribblett had a grist mill, a shingle mill and a blacksmith shop. He was the son of Abraham Ribblett who first settled on the farm that is still known in this community as the old Ribblett farm. His father received the grant of land from the government, cleared the ground and established his home here. It was on this land that oil was discovered, which has been mentioned in a previous chapter.

Not far from this community, in the Salt Lick valley there was once a small settlement although now there is nothing to mark the spot. John and Mary Kurtz lived here about the beginning of the 19th century. They were the parents of one child, Annie. Mrs. Kurtz was a midwife and presided at the birth of many of our older residents. Here also lived the Daniel Keough family. Mr. and Mrs. Keough were the great-grandparents of Mrs. Daniel Brown who now lives in the Brown community. Daniel Murphy who was the father of Mrs. Brown was the grandson of this pioneer family. Daniel Murphy's parents lived in Center county and Daniel came here and located at Vinco in the old Samuel Allbaugh house where he resided until his death.

Near Burkhart's Crossing is located Wildcat Rocks, a favorite spot for hikers and nature lovers. It is an area of rugged beauty, with huge rock formations and caves and has remained in an untouched and primitive state. The place was named for the little animal, native to its rocky hills.

Chickaree

Chickaree Mountain is 2,400 feet above sea level and is the highest point in the township. A few years ago a fire tower was erected there and on a clear day one could see Cresson, a distance of over 20 miles, with a pair of field glasses. John Meegan, on whose farm the tower was located was its caretaker for the five years it stood there. The farm now occupied by Miss Jennie Meegan and her niece, Catherine Mahan, was first cleared by John Rager, a descendant of Michael Rager. John built a two-room house on the land which he cleared, and lived there many years, later moving to the Lambaugh place near the Jack Rager school. John Rager was a great uncle of Israel Rager, an old resident of Vinco who has descendants living there. A widow named Vochrod of Johnstown purchased the farm from Rager who in turn sold it to Charles Ellis, and from him it went to Squire Flattery who sold it to James Meegan in 1871. James Meegan, his wife and two of their children came to this country from Ireland. The rest of their family were born here. They were Hugh, Margaret, John and Jennie. They came to Jackson township seventy years ago.

The Meegan boys grew to manhood on the farm, but in 1873 Peter, an older son, went west to seek his fortune, which he was successful in doing. He had a gold mine and about twenty years ago he wrote his family that he was coming home to spend the remainder of his days here. However, on the eve of his scheduled trip he disappeared, and although his disappearance was thoroughly investigated, no trace of him was ever found. John Meegan stayed on the farm and was also a carpenter. He and his brother, Hugh, were men of good education and were congenial, with a large circle of friends. John died in 1930 and Hugh in 1934. In addition to managing the farm, Jennie Meegan is also the owner and operator of a coal mine. She is the oldest lady operator of a coal mine in the state. David Leidy was another old-time resident in the Chickaree community. He lived on the farm now owned by the Ley family. His first wife died in 1848, after which he married the widow of Conrad Rager and moved to Leidy's Lane.

George Rannels was another early settler of Chickaree. He owned a farm there in 1830.

Dishong Hill

Dishong Hill lies in the southwestern part of Jackson township and was named for Abraham and Mary Dishong who settled there between 1821 and 1830. They were the parents of Henry, Peter, John and Fred. Henry moved to Johnstown just before the Flood of '89 where he and his mother died shortly after moving there. His wife and two daughters died in the flood and one son, Webster, survived. Fred married and acquired 400 acres of land in 1840, but left no heirs. Peter married and owned a 200 acre farm where the Dishong school now stands. He left several descendants. John was also the father of a large family.

Noah Dishong, a descendant of Abraham, was born on Dishong Hill on property now owned by a water company. A brother, Israel, a soldier in the Civil War, starved to death while a prisoner at Andersonville prison. David Dishong, another brother was also a soldier in the Civil War, as was Noah. George Dishong married Ellen Rager, daughter of Jackson Rager, who settled near the school that bears his name. She still resides there. Noah Dishong married Amanda Rose and they were the ancestors of 82 descendants. Among their fourteen children was Oscar, who died in Vintondale in 1927, Amos of Nanty-Glo and Mrs. Priscilla Altimus of Mundy's Corner. Noah was a farmer, the farm now occupied by Mrs. Ida Ditchcreek having belonged to him. He also operated a coal mine on his farm. He was wounded in the battle at Gettysburg and two years after leaving the army his right leg had to be removed due to the old wound having failed to heal.

At one time there was a Duncan settlement, near Vintondale. In 1830 there were four Duncan families living there. They were Davis, Thomas, Joseph and James. Davis owned 80 acres of ground, Thomas 100 acres, Joseph, 149 and James 183 acres. The **mother (see note)** of Mark Kerr, whose many descendants make up a part of the population of Jackson township, was a Duncan. For a time a Duncan school was in session, but its existence was brief and the children of the locality now attend other nearby schools.

NOTE! The following correction was not a part of the original chapter seventeen and was added by R.E. McDowell in 2006.

It was Mark Kerr's **wife** that was a Duncan, not his **mother**. Mark Kerr's wife was Mary Ellen Duncan, daughter of John W. Duncan and Sarah Weagley. Mark Kerr's parents were James Kerr and Sara Repine. Both John Duncan and James Kerr lived just over the line in Indiana County, a few miles from Vintondale.

Ford's Corners

Ford's Corners was named for Ben Ford who owned 114 acres there and conducted a general merchandising store on the corner several years from 1910. His grandfather was Michael Ford, born in 1798, who settled on what is generally known as the old red Grove place at Vinco. William, son of Michael, was born in 1835, married Sussana Snyder, daughter of Christian Snyder, one of the first settlers who lived on what is now the Earl Varner property at Vinco. William moved to what is now Ford's Corners in 1894 and later his son, Ben, bought the property from John Gray who had received it from his mother, a daughter of Henry Rager. Henry Rager was born in 1810 and was the son of Michael Rager. Henry had a tavern and a stable for coach horses which stood near the corner. He also was a freighter. With six horses he would make the trip between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, taking six weeks for the round trip. This was before the time of railroads and all freight not hauled by canal was taken overland. Mr. Rager was also a blacksmith and made his own nails.

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