

Jackson Township

Cambria County, Pennsylvania



Chapter 22

Annals of Jackson Township

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Communities And Their First Settlers

Vinco And Singer hill

Vinco, as it is now known, is situated in the southern part of the township on the highway that connects Johnstown with Route 22 at Mundy's Corner. This highway was completed in 1819 and has been the main line of travel between Johnstown and Ebensburg since that time. The route of the original highway has been changed, however, in recent years. Vinco is one of the oldest, if not the oldest settlement in the township, the name "Vinco," however being comparatively new. The first name given to this fast growing community was Wallopsburg ('65-'67) and why it was called that is not definitely known, although there are several reasons advanced for it, one being that one of the first settlers was so strict with his numerous offspring that he was always "walloping" them, but some one with a sense of humor must have started that one. Wallopsburg was a very small place, consisting of a few scattered houses, and one of the first houses built here was a log one which stood across the road from the present Leidy's Service Station, where a Settlemire family lived. Mr. Settlemire was a watchmaker, repaired watches and guns and lived there before 1866. Alex Fresh, a son of John Fresh, was a blacksmith and lived near there.

Across from where the Brethren Church now stands there were then two houses, small frame structures occupied by Henry Cooper and George Markadan and their families. Later the place was called Fairview and in a business directory of 1867 we find the names of Jonathan Custer, Philip Custer, John C. Elder, W.W. Harris, and Peter and John Kinney. Later, in 1890, there was a population of 71 persons and a map of the place discloses a Center Street and a Main Street. Center Street is the one running past the Brethren Church and what is now the old brick road was Main Street, which was the main thoroughfare until recent years.

William W. Harris who was one of the most prominent citizens of the township was born in Bedford county and came here before 1840. He occupied several of the township offices and was called Squire Harris, being justice of the peace. He owned 180 acres of ground, a saw mill, a tannery and had a tobacco factory in the community. He also had his own carriage, which was something of a distinction in those days, as it was the only one in the township at that time. Squire Harris would drive a team of horses hitched to a wagon to Philadelphia to buy furniture and yard goods, buying muslin and calicoes by the bolt, which resulted in his many daughters having dresses of the same cloth, not always to their liking. A melodeon, chairs and Chesterfield sofa, which he brought from Philadelphia, are still the cherished possessions of the Harris Wakefield family, descendants of his. They also own the cradle and spinning wheel used by this "first" family.

Many of the local residents do not know that at one time a cigar factory was located here, and the tobacco was raised here, on what is now the Shuman farm at the edge of Vinco. A chicken coop now on the place was the barn for drying the tobacco. Mr. Harris employed several men and a very good brand of cigar was manufactured and shipped away. The Harris tannery was located just about where the Wakefield Dam now is. Recently when Harris Wakefield was digging on his place he uncovered parts of the wooden pipeline that was laid to the tannery to carry water. The Harris's raised their own flax, made their own linen towels and sheets and other articles, some of which are yet in the possession of their descendants.

This early settler and his wife who was Mary Albaugh, a daughter of Rev. David Albaugh, a Dunkard minister, were the parents of ten children. This family of Albaughs was of Dutch descent. A son of the Harris's married Miss Margaret Cooper, daughter of James Cooper after who Coopersdale was named. A son, Clem, built the house which the late Robert Varner later purchased from him and where Mr. Varner and his family lived for many years. The place is now owned and occupied by Guy Walk and family. A son of the Harris's, Orange, settled on what is now known as the old Smith farm. A daughter, Sarah Ann, married Dr. J.C. Wakefield in 1882 and they had one son, Harris Wakefield, one of the most prominent of the local residents who still resides with his wife and family on the Wakefield homestead, which is one of the beauty spots of the township.

Harris Wakefield is married to Laura Wakefield, daughter of Rev. J.H. Boozer, an Evangelical minister who was then the pastor of the Evangelical congregation in this community. At Vinco the sect held services in the old Custer Hall, and at Mundy's Corner there was an Evangelical church which has since been torn down. An old record shows that plans were formed to erect a church at Vinco and lumber and other donations were given by W.W. Harris, Philip Custer, C. Harrison, J.M. Singer, Jacob Clinefelter, Jonathan Custer, Thomas Harrison and a Mr. Renfrew. This was in 1866. The plan for some reason was abandoned. In 1887, however, we read that "W.H. Harris and wife sold to Philip Custer, George Varner, John Dunmire, Elias Monday and B.F. Riblett, trustees of the parsonage property of Fairview Circuit, Pittsburgh Conference of the Evangelical Church Association of North America, and their successors in office," a piece of land which was to be used by the ministers of that faith who were stationed here. The parsonage was erected where the Rodkey home is now, on the old brick road. The land was purchased for \$62.

A grist mill was built on the Salt Lick Branch, just below Vinco, by Thomas Goughnour at the turn of the 19th century and farmers for miles around would bring their grain to be ground into flour, buckwheat or cornmeal. The mill was known as the Old Red Mill and was operated by water power. The mill stone is all that remains of the big structure which was torn down about twenty or thirty years ago. Later the mill was owned by George Wehn, who came here from Altoona and who also conducted a dry goods, grocery and jewelry store in Vinco, in a little building where the Brethren parsonage now stands, and of which it is a part. Mr. When would make trips to his native Germany where he would purchase the jewelry. He also sold sewing machines which were then something quite new. Wehn was the father of six children by his second wife, one of whom was Caroline, first wife of James Singer, a well known resident of the township.

Thomas Goughnour was the father of Samuel who also had two saw mills in the township, and a grist mill which passed into the hands of When, and finally a man by name of Blackburn by which that particular place in this community is still known.

On the corner where Walter Mackall's home is there was first a little school house about 20 by 30 feet in dimensions. In 1873 or a little later it was moved across the road and a Mr. Empfield remodeled it and David Simmons had a store there. Mr. Simmons was also the postmaster, which doesn't mean quite what it does today. When anyone would go to town they would bring the mail for all the residents and leave it at the store where they would call for it. This little school which was later a store is now a part of the Brethren parsonage.

After the school was moved, William Richard had an inn and tavern on the vacated ground. Adjoining it were the homes of two brothers, Jonathan and Philip Custer. Philip was a wagonmaker and justice of the peace and also made coffins. In the influenza epidemic of 1918, coffins were so scarce that when the daughter of a local family died with the disease none could be obtained so lumber that Philip Custer had stored in the old

Custer hall at Vinco was found and utilized in construction of one. Walter Mackall, Vinco blacksmith doing the carpentering and Mrs. Harris Wakefield lining the casket with silk.

Jonathan Custer and Philip were the sons of Frederick and Sophia (Fisher) Custer and their great-grandfather was a native of Holland. Jonathan was a blacksmith here in 1858 when he built the house that still bears his name, and also conducted a store. He had three daughters, Elizabeth Stiffler of this township, Sophie Davies of Conmaugh and Annie Sensibaugh, and two sons, Emmanuel and Frederick. Emmanuel for a time, was the publisher and owner of a local monthly newspaper, or magazine called the "Wallopsburg Journal" which contained all the news of the surrounding communities.

The Custer Hall at Vinco was long a landmark, and was the social center for the community for many years. Here would be held the literary societies, entertainments, box socials, oyster suppers, lodge meetings, and an occasional dance, and for a time church services for the Evangelical sect. The structure had two stories, the upper being used for the social affairs and the lower for storage. It stood across the street from the Philip Custer home and was in use as late as 1920, but as it became unsafe to hold large crowds social affairs were discontinued there and the building was torn down within the last few years.

The name of a man whom the residents of the township are proud to say belonged to one of their own communities was that of Dr. Joseph Camel Wakefield who presided at the birth of a large share of the local residents. Dr. Wakefield, a son of Thomas and Annie (Sides) Wakefield, was born in Indiana county in 1853. His grandfather Sides was of German stock and was one of the first settlers of Indiana county. The Wakefields are of English descent. The story is told that the ancestor of the Wakefields, having gotten in ill favor with the King, was forced to flee to Ireland to save his life, and accomplished the feat by the aid of his wife who hid him in a hogshead of clothing and shipped him to the Emerald Isle. This is the story told by members of the Wakefield family to this day, when they are trying to prove the authenticity of their claim as members of the same family. When the Wakefields first settled in this country it was at Baltimore.

Dr. Wakefield was educated at Mechanicburg Academy, Homer City Academy, at the former school studying under the late Dr. B.F. Tomb. He was graduated from the Western Reserves Medical School at Cleveland, Ohio. He first practiced medicine at Penn Run, then went to Strongstown and from there came to Vinco where he was the only local doctor for forty years. He was also the company doctor for Vintonclale and Nanty-Glo, maintaining offices in Nanty-Glo, as well as at his home. He was twice married. He and his first wife, Mary Stewart of Brush Valley, first lived in a small house at Vinco, now known as the Cobaugh place, where they had a child who died, and where Mrs. Wakefield died after two years of marriage. In 1882 he married Sarah Ann Harris, a school teacher, and daughter of W.W. Harris, prominent citizen of the community. They built the home now occupied by their son, Harris, and his family, spending the remainder of their lives there. Dr. Wakefield was prominent in civic affairs of the community and was the secretary of the school board and secretary of the supervisors for a period. He also taught school in his later years.

Dr. Wakefield served as the dentist for his friends and neighbors too, and with all his duties he yet found time to enjoy his hobby of bee raising, having usually about 80 hives of bees which he cared for himself. To Dr. Wakefield and John Allbaugh go the credit of changing the name of Fairview to Vinco. According to the story, word had been received by the local postmaster that, as there were more than one Fairview in the state, resulting in confusion to the postal authorities, a new name was desired for the local village. One evening a group of men had gathered in the store and post office conducted by David Simmons and were discussing the matter between them. A popular tobacco at that time was a brand known as the "Vinco" tobacco, which Mr. Allbaugh was using at the time, and he humorously suggested it as a suitable name, which suggestion Dr. Wakefield took and it was adopted as the name of their village.

Dr. Wakefield was a Methodist and served on the official board, holding membership at the Wesley Chapel Methodist Church. He died in April of 1926. A grandson-in-law, Dr. Kent Hornbrook of New Martinsburg, West Virginia, who is married to Marjory, daughter of the Harris Wakefields, a graduate nurse, is the possessor of all of the office equipment, including medical books, the late doctor used in his long ministering to the local people.

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