

Jackson Township

Cambria County, Pennsylvania



Jackson Township History

by Adam Yesenosky

Many people wonder what took place over the history of Jackson Township. Unfortunately, a lot of our local history has been lost because little has been written about it. There are only five books available: an Atlas written in 1890; a biographical cyclopedia in 1896; Storey's history of 1907; Gable's history of 1926; and the county sesquicentennial booklet published in 1954 with brief narratives written by high school students.

A brief history in the 1990 Jackson Township Directory was taken from this booklet. The 1890 Atlas tells about Jackson Township on its 62nd year of operation. There's a map of the township showing 9 school buildings, 2 sawmills, 2 grist mills, 4 timbering areas, 7 coal veins and 4 churches: Lutheran, Progressive Brethren, Dunkard and Albright. The Atlas reports the Township population at 1,104; Fairview with 71; and shows Vinco as the post office location. There are no railroads or large towns. The Pittsburgh Pike is shown crossing west to east.

The author states that "an available outlet for the underlying strata of coal will, no doubt, in the near future, make this section of the county teem with business activity." A business directory for the Township shows:

At Vinco the listing includes eight individuals:

- ~J. W. Walker, farmer, grain and stock raiser and owner of four veins of coal.
- ~P. F. Custer, dealer in finished lumber, Justice of the Peace and wagon maker.
- ~David Simmons, dealer in groceries, general merchandise and country produce and postmaster.
- ~G. C. Varner or Barner, merchant in groceries and general merchandise.
- ~Rev. J. W. Smouss, pastor of the Progressive Brethren Church.
- ~William J. Rose, teacher and stenographer.
- ~Emanuel Custer, blacksmith
- ~Dr. Joseph C. Wakefield, physician and surgeon.

Dr. Wakefield was also a civic leader. He was born in West Wheatfield Township, Indiana County in 1853. He graduated from Cleveland Medical College at the age of 25 and started practicing medicine in Penn Run. Six months later he went into a partnership with a Dr. Davison at Strongstown for a year. About 1880, he located in Fairview where he also was a school director and justice of the peace. Through his efforts, the post office was located here but the name of Fairview was not acceptable because there were so many other Fairviews in Pennsylvania. So, the citizens had to come up with a name acceptable to the Postal Department. Fairview's elders got locked in debate and at a cracker barrel session John Allbaugh pulled out his pouch of the then popular Vinco Chewing Tobacco and as a joke he suggested naming the post office Vinco. Dr. Wakefield immediately seconded the motion. This is how Vinco got its name.

Back in 1865, Vinco was known as Wallopsburg. Did this mean it was settled by fighting people? Evidently, the inhabitants were displeased with the name and in 1867 came up with Fairview. The post office was located here about 1900 and closed in 1914.

T. J. Clinefelter, teacher; David Burkhardt, owner of a steam saw mill and lumber dealer (probably where Burkhardt Cross Roads got its name); Henry Adams, farmer and stock

raiser; Lewis James, Thomas M. James and J. J. Pergrim, lumbermen were all listed at a place named Coopersdale. Farmer and stock raiser Daniel Shuman was listed for Buffington, Pennsylvania. Other Townshipers listed were James M. Singer, farmer; M. A. Riblett, farmer, grain and stock raiser, dealer in flour and feed, blacksmithing and five good coal veins; and Samuel Brallier, a farmer, lumberman and owner of five veins of coal.

This area was a vast wilderness of dense forests and wild animals when the heirs of William Penn purchased all the land south of the Kittanning Trail for \$10,000 in 1768 from the Indians. A land office was opened in 1769 in Lancaster to offer the land to interested settlers and speculators. A person who wanted to settle on a certain tract of land, paid a sum of money and provided two copies of a survey (one for himself and the other for the State) at the Lancaster land office. The requirement was that the person had to clear 5 acres within two years, build a house and raise grain annually for 5 years - then, he got exclusive rights for the land, granted through a patent.

However, there were Squatter's Rights whereby a person chose 400 shares of unoccupied land, built a house, lived on the land five years and cleared 5 of the 400 acres and then paid the Commonwealth \$150 and got a deed for the 400 acres. This created a lot of problems because often squatters would choose a settler's 400 acres for which the settler had a warrant. The squatter built a house, stayed on the land 5 years and then applied for the deed. Many lawsuits developed and usually they were settled with the squatter getting 150 acres and the original settler who held the warrant getting the remaining 250 acres. If you wanted to race the original ownership of the tract of land you are living on, you would run into much difficulty because the Lancaster Courthouse had a fire in which the original warrants, patents and deeds were destroyed. The earliest deeds recorded for Cambria County date from 1804 when the County was created from parts of Bedford County, Huntingdon County and Somerset County.

The Jackson Township map in the 1890 Atlas shows the names of those who held the original surveys. In the Vinco area, the surveys were in the names of Elisha Adam, John Brown, Peter Mack and John Barren. Continuing up Route 271 to old Route 22, the surveys were in the names of George Findley and D. Shakespeare. In many cases, these people never saw or visited the land because they were automatically issued by the Commonwealth to War Veterans. Also when you consider that this was a place in the wilderness, who cared? Those who settled were settlers on the move westward in search of a place to claim as their own. How did the early settlers get to Jackson Township? In all probability they came over the Front from Frankstown on the Juniata River into Blair's Gap (Old U. S. 22) and were immigrated Welsh Protestants.

In 1804, Cambria County started with three townships: Allegheny in the Northern section; Conemaugh in the Southern section and Cambria in the middle or center section. The county's population in 1810 was 2,117 and by 1816 there were only three locations identified: Ebensburg with 150 people; Munster with 80 people and Johnstown with 60 people. By 1825 Ebensburg was incorporated as the first borough because the old stone or northern pike made Ebensburg prosperous in 1820 since it was a stopping point for stages and Conestoga wagons. This road was known as the Huntingdon, Indiana & Cambria Turnpike which carried travelers to Pittsburgh. The road had nine toll gates.

Another development at about the same time was a road laid out of Johnstown to Mundy's Corner. This was the beginning of Route 271 which dates back to 1819. It extended from Johnstown, through a vast forest area and ended up at Mundys Corner (then known as Belleau) because there were two small cabins here occupied by two French families named Belleau. The location became Mundy's Square for Martin Mundy, a first family from Germany in 1848. Jackson Township became the 7th Township in Cambria County. It was made up from parts of Cambria, Conemaugh and Summerhill Townships. It was named for President Andrew Jackson who was President at the time Jackson Township was created in 1828.

The State's first public highways were waterways. An act of the State Legislature in 1829 declared Blacklick Creek as a public highway. These developments suggest why Jackson Township came about so early in the County's history. Consider that this was before the completion of the Allegheny-Portage Railroad through the mountains. Settlers were coming through Ebensburg because the Conemaugh Valley hadn't even been developed yet.

The first inhabitants of this area were Delaware Indians. A story is told that a friendly Delaware Indian named Joe Wipey was murdered in 1774 by John Hinckston and James

Cooper while the Indiana was sitting in his canoe fishing near Hinckston Run. This is how Hinckston Run is believed to have gotten its name. There is another tale that a friendly Indian medicine man cured early settlers with his teas and herbs.

One early record shows that a Squire William W. Harris came to the Vinco area in 1844 and started a lumbering and tanning business. He had a dam where the Atlantic Refining Bulk Plant was located. Two brothers, Jonathan and Phillip Custer are said to have settled around Vinco in 1858 and built two identical houses. By 1860 Jackson Township had grown to 854 people. At this time, the County counted only 29,000 people.

The early Township industries included a cigar factory, grist mills, sugar camps, saw mills, blacksmith shops, house coal operations, tobacco growing and exporting, making of flax and manufacturing shooks which were used to make boxes, barrels and casks. The shook shop flourished until the supply of oak trees gave out. About 1878, oil was discovered ion several properties and local stockholders formed the Jackson Township Oil Company. It didn't last long because they encountered problems drilling, getting their tools stuck and many other obstacles.

Scattered through the Township, it became inevitable that settlements were named after early settlers. This is how we got Brown, Clinefelter, Burkharts Crossing, Jack Rager, Dishong, Ford's Corners, Leidy's Lane, Leidy's Field and Singer Hill. Chickaree came about because in 1882 the Clinefelter Community organized a singing school at Rager School. When they arrived at the school they found a lone native squirrel, a Chickaree.

At the turn of the 19th Century, there was a water-powered Red Mill just below Vinco on Hinckston Run where farmers had their grain ground into flour, buckwheat or corn meal. During its history, this mill changed hands many times. There was a George Wehn from Altoona who operated a dry goods, grocery, jewelry store and sold sewing machines here. He was followed by a Mr. Blackburn. The road past the mill was named for him. J. L. Mitchell bought the site in 1875 for surface and mineral rights. Jim M. Singer took ownership next. He employed a miller. Singer was a former Recorder of Deeds at the Courthouse. The next owner was Walter Mackall. About 1925 a Mr. Churilla purchased the mill and eventually dismantled it. A chemical works was established in 1911. Landowners sold timber to the Chemical Works and the timber was used to make dyes and other products.

A listing of prominent citizens of the early 1900s included James Mackall, storekeeper and postmaster; Philip Custer, undertaker and owner of a steam planing mill where he made bobsleds, wagon wheels and his own coffins; Dwight Griffith who owned a farm and worked 18 years for the State Health Department and also as Deputy Warden at the County Jail; Rudolph Boozer, Vinco Teacher; Floyd Collins, Mineral Point Teacher; Scott Cobaugh who owned a fertilizer store; and Fred Grove who owned the only threshing machine. He visited all farms with his separator and steam boiler on wheels drawn by horses. He was also the Vinco Church Choir Director.

Around this time there was a social hall in Vinco for community activities. It is interesting to note that these activities consisted of square dancing, ice cream festivals, barn raisings, baseball teams, quilting parties, apple snitzings, corn husking, chopping frolics, log rolling, stone frolics at which stones were collected for barn foundations, taffy pulls and sleighing parties. There was a Lincoln Literary Society that met weekly in the Winter.

Let's take a brief look at Jackson Township's voting record. In 1828, nine voters chose Jackson and seven Adams in the Presidential Election. Four years later, 41 of 43 voters chose Jackson. In the 1860 elections, 107 voted for Lincoln while 34 voted for Douglas. Four years later, 68 voted for Lincoln and 54 from McClellan. The first time over 200 went to the polls was in 1888 when 132 voted for Harrison vs. 72 for Cleveland.

Did you know that Jackson Township was served with a Southern Cambria street car from 1912 to 1928. This street car is credited with helping populate the Township during this period. The street car started at Johnstown's Main Street near Central Park and then crossed Clinton Street. A 1,064 foot steel trestle went over the Conemaugh River and the Pennsylvania Railroad Mainline to Woodvale. From here it traveled down to Conemaugh making its stop at Davis Drug Store. Stops followed at Parkhill, Echo and Brookdale. At Brookdale, the Southern Cambria had its power house and barn. At this point there was a switch North to Ebensburg or straight ahead to South Fork. At the Brookdale Switch the next stop was at Vinco Road. This was about 3 miles from Route 271. Next was at the

Burkhart farm and sawmill; then at John Ogden's large dairy farm; continuing on to Pensacola and Ebensburg. This street car (trolley) made 33 stops daily beginning at 5:30 am in Johnstown and ending after Midnight. It was a big improvement for people who wanted to go from Johnstown to Ebensburg because formerly they had to take a P.R.R. train from Johnstown to Cresson. At Cresson there was a long wait for a local to Ebensburg. The street car ride from Johnstown to Vinco Road took 46 minutes and to Ebensburg was an additional 20 minutes making it over a one hour ride.

Early Township schools consisted of as many as 10 one-room schools scattered throughout and usually on local farms. They were named after the property owners or nearest farm; such as: Duncan, Dishong, Harris, Allbaugh, Clinefelter, Wagner, Jack Rager, Pike, Burkhart, Leidy, Brown, Teeter and Gray. Two others were located in Vinco and Chickaree. By 1879 there were 42 School Districts in Cambria County. Jackson Township had 10 school buildings. The school terms were only five months. The Township employed 5 male and 5 female teachers who earned about \$25 a month. Total enrollment consisted of 161 boys and 158 girls. The school tax was 12 mills. The State appropriation amounted to \$162.07. The Township total school expenses for 1879 were \$1,726 of which \$1,270 was for teachers' salaries. This came to an average cost of 85 cents a month per pupil.

At this time, Jackson Township was the 10th largest school district in the County; Ebensburg was 8th and Conemaugh 6th. By 1917, there were only two schools: Mundy's Corner with 374 students and Vinco with 347. Seven busses hauled 240 to Ebensburg High School. In 1943 Jackson Township was one of 55 School Districts in the County with 13 teachers and six schools: Mundy's Corner, Vinco, Chickaree, Wagner, Burkhart and Jack Rager. Dwight Singer, Mrs. Cordelia Swope Haddad, George Leidy, Mr. Ernest Flowers and Catherine Evans taught grades 1 through 8 at Mundy's Corner. Dorsey Eash, Mrs. Elizabeth Picking, Iverda Link and Garnet May Spires taught grades 1 through 8 at Vinco.

The other four schools were one room with Mabel Irene Griffith-Chickaree, John Bracken-Wagner, Mrs. Elda Nicols-Burkhart and Mrs. Gail Riethmiller-Jack Rager. The approximate time would have been the late 50's or early 60's. At this time you had five School Directors: W. W. Daughtery, Harvey C. Hunt, Isaac Miller, J. W. Helsel Jr. And Albert Lehman. In 1963 Jackson Township became part of Central Cambria Joint School District as the County was reduced to 21 school districts. Now you only had two elementary schools: Mundy's Corner with Dwight Singer as principal and 15 teachers and Vinco with 8 teachers. Paul Dodworth was the Township's music teacher and Mrs. Mary Ann Druzel was the Township art teacher. Richard Costello was the principal until the Vinco School was closed in June of 1972. Today the only school building in the Township is Jackson Elementary near Mundy's Corner.

With four churches in 1890, Jackson Township now has ten; Vinco Brethren, Singer Hill Grace Brethren, St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran, St. John Vianneys Catholic, Pike Grace Brethren, Laurel Mountain Bible, Bethel Full Gospel Mission, Chickaree Union, Mount Olive United Methodist and the Jehovah Witness Kingdom Hall.

Dorsey Eash held membership card # 1 of the Jackson Township Fire Company and was the first secretary for that organization. The first fire truck was a Diamond Reo costing \$800. In the beginning there was no fire hall yet and the truck was kept in Allbaugh's Garage and later Dick's Garage, which was later the site of the Vinco Hobby Hut. Free ambulance service began in 1950. From 1940 to 1990 Cambria County's population dropped 25% but during that same time, Jackson Township population more than doubled from 2,442 to 5,213. From 1970 to 1980 housing units in Jackson Township increased 46% and families went over the 1500 mark. This has been accomplished by using only less than 5% of the 30,000 acres which make up the Township.