

Life in 1873 & 1874 York County

When 1873 began in York County the county was still under martial law, though it was beginning to settle down from so much violent political activism. After 5 years of occupation the federal government was growing tired of its work of Reconstruction and was seeking reasons to remove their soldiers from the Yorkville garrison. In March Troop K of the 7th cavalry was ordered to remove to the Dakota Territory to protect the surveyors of the Northern Pacific Railroad from Indian attacks. Of course, we know the fate of the 7th cavalry. Camp life in York must have terrible stressing since a number of soldiers buried in the old Methodist cemetery died by. Those there had been several suicides before 1873, none were reported that year, but in February of the following year Corporal John Shea of Company C died of a self-inflicted wound by a musket.

Suicide was not confined to the military. The Reconstruction Era was fraught with years of terrible economics. Many farmers had to sell their real estate holding just to eke out a living and pay taxes. All too often farms went on the auction block of the courthouse and sold for delinquent taxes. Guyon Bolin of the Smyrna area purchased one such parcel of 100 acres for a little more than \$17. Reports of suicide were reported throughout those years of economic situation for years. Unable to the stress some hanged or shot themselves.

In 1879, a bill, later known as the Fence Law, put before the Republican controlled General Assembly was being debated all over the county--and would be for a number of years. At the time livestock owners enjoyed free range of their cattle and were required only fence in their yards and crop. If this bill passed it would reverse the policy that had existed from the earliest settlement of this country. Environmentalists argued that the cutting of timber for the rail fences would devastate forests, but what they did not know was that a new invention was about to be introduced--barbed wire. Most farmers and cattlemen were in agreement with the passage of the Fence Law (even though it was a Yankee idea), while the poor were in strong opposition, knowing that fences would make cattle rustling more difficult.

Crime and acts of violence that we too often reserve for the present were taking place during 1873 and 1874, though less frequent. Frustration over the changing social order and disenfranchisement were great horrific stress factors; this frustration often erupted in violent acts following the Civil War. One of the most appalling acts of violence during the 1870s in York was discovered when the head of an infant was found on the "Burnt Lot" in January 1873. The mother was soon arrested and prosecution followed. The next year an abandoned, rain soaked baby was found at the Chester Depot. The following April a murder took place and the accused was arrested. However, violence usually took the form of assault and battery. These cases filled the courts, and had remained so since settlement began in the mid-1700s. For a simple assault and Battery one might expect to be fined a whopping \$1.00.

On a lighter side, the people of York County found it ironic that a man was arrested in Columbia for stealing from Ex-Governor Scott. The ironic part was that Scott, known as the "Robber Governor" had previously pardoned the man for a conviction of thief.

Residents across 1873 Western York County were being informed of a number of changes in the

postal service. Andrew F. Lindsay resigned as Postmaster of McConnellsburg to take the same position at a new post office established at Lowrysburg. E. N. Cranford was appointed to replace Lindsay at McConnellsburg. Lindsay probably had hoped to be located near his store in Lowrysburg, but unfortunately his business was destroyed by fire a little over a year later. John R. Wallace was appointed Postmaster at York, replacing John R. Alexander who had served the office for 17 years. At the same time town residents were notified that the office was being moved to a room at the Hackett building across from the Rose Hotel. (This site is now a parking lot for the courthouse.) At Antioch, now in Cherokee County, Dr. A. F. Hambright was appointed Postmaster and the Harmony Post Office was moved to Black's Station, now Blacksburg. In the northwest corner of the county, a post office known as "Clover" was established in the store of Carroll & Campbell; Zimi Carroll was appointed Postmaster.

Like today, affordable healthcare in 1873 was on the minds of the poor as well as the county leaders. To meet medical needs Dr. Thomas Whitesides was appointed physician for the destitute in Bullock's Creek Township and Dr. J. W. Allison for the poor in Broad River Township.

Diphtheria was a dreaded and often fatal disease. An outbreak in 1873 seems to have centered in a little community in Union County, just across the Broad River and the town of Hickory Grove. The first reported case was that of nearly five-year-old Mary Jane Regina Estes, the daughter of Sylvanus Estes. She died in of the disease in August 1873. Less than a week, a cousin, two and a half year old Mary Eliza died. Two days later, a nearby neighbor's three-year-old daughter, Marietta Jane Strain, for whom the community was later named. A little more than a week her brother (1 year) died of diphtheria. In October Elizabeth Lavina Smith (5 years) died at Hopewell near Hickory Grove. That same month the Estes family was decimated when five more of the family's children and infants were struck down. These deaths effected a number of allied families in Western York County.

The following year an outbreak of diphtheria fell upon a small agricultural community of Blairsville, three miles south of Sharon. In August, five-year-old Cornelia Latham died. Next Ella Sherer (6) died, then two days later seven-year-old Robert Mitchell of Hopewell and then Sally J. Rainey, age 6, at Blairsville. Not far away five year old J. T. Whitesides succumbed and again at Blairsville, infant Samuel Edward Black. The family of J. G. Minter was hit hard. First to die was 4 year old Laveca Annette, Dordia, (6), John Ross, (8) and Lizzie Jane Minter (1). In October death conquered the infant son of W. L. Plexico and Nora Robinson, 4 years old daughter of J. M. Robinson; and infants Mary Frances Plexico, William Coln and Martha Whitesides. The W. A. Carson family suffered the loss of their children: Catherine, Willie and Eliza Jane on October 11, 12 and 13 consecutively. During these two years others died of pneumonia, heart dropsy, accidental shootings and old age. One interesting accident occurred on Broad River near Bullock's Creek. It was reported that while fishing one of the men caught an eel and while attempting to stomp it to death kicked a hole in the boat and both men drowned.

A fire destroyed the Smyrna Associate Reformed Church in December of 73, supposedly set by a deranged man. The congregation quickly responded and within six months the congregation had rebuilt their meetinghouse and Rev Ross was thanking the congregations of Mount Vernon Methodist and Canaan Methodist for allowing them the use of their meetinghouses. During July

Ross received his doctorate of divinity from Washington and Jefferson College in Pennsylvania, having been a graduate of Washington College before it united with Jefferson.

When 1874 opened, it seemed to be a repeat of preceding years. Farmers were still eking out a living and the sharecropper system began developing that would put many men to work but place them into economic slavery the poor could not overthrow. Democrats were still looking for the day the reins of state government could be snatched away from Radical controlled. That time would not come for another two years; in the meantime federal troops still occupied Columbia, Yorkville and other hot spots.

To alleviate the shortage of laborers, South Carolina was actively supporting immigration. In March 1874 the family of Thomas Cross arrived in York from England, sponsored by Rev. Gains. Gains was an immigration worker for the state and had been responsible for bringing nearly a 1000 people into South Carolina. Emigrant Cross wasted no time settling in his new home land and by the following July he was advertising his blacksmith business saying he could repair steam engine, sewing machines, locks and wagons--for cash.

Another man who provided services for cash only was Samuel Jefferies who owned the locally fabled horse, Caesar. The horse had won his fame during the Civil War and was said to have been the fastest racer in several counties. Jefferies advertised Caesar in the *Yorkville Enquirer* for stud service. For twenty-five dollars in cash Jefferies would guarantee a foal and a horseman might have Caesar visit a farm for one month for \$15 or one visit for \$10.

The same month Cross's anvil began ringing, work on York's Presbyterian Church had many of the residents standing in the street and gawking into the sky. The onlookers were fascinated and entertained as they watched several men scaled the steeple to install a lightning rod. George Phillips of the military garrison and known as an old sailor was the first to ascend the 150-foot "finger of God" by driving spikes into the timbers and using them as steps. Eventually the rod was put into place by Mr. Snyder, the contractor, and assisted by Phillips and John T. Grist.

Because of the economic situation many farmers and their hired hands, in order to provide for their families, resulted to an illegal method of making money. The art of whiskey making was common knowledge among Southerners as it had always been a staple for most social events and, was a quick way of making money. While it was profitable, it was also risky business. Law officials were constantly making raids to break up stills and punish the offender, an activity that continued for more than a half century with little results. While most of the men hauled to jail were sharecroppers who were physically running the operation, it was often the landowner who supplied the corn and sugar and took a cut of the profits. Raids by the Sheriff and his deputies were little more effective than a dog chasing his tail. The Sheriff would make a raid, drag the culprits off to jail, then the landowner would come to town, demand "his people" to be set free to work the farm, a small fine was paid and the cycle started all over again. Occasionally there were "big busts," like the one that took place in March 1874. In this raid 17 Western York County men were arrested. One man was arrested on his way to North Carolina with an empty wagon to buy corn for their whiskey ring. Because the wagon was empty, he was released for lack of evidence.

And that was life in York County in 1873 and 1874.