

HISTORY OF THE BEAVER VALLEY.

Correspondence of the Pittsburgh Gazette.

BEAVER VALLEY, June, 1873.

[Paper of 17.]

NEW BRIGHTON'S EARLY DAYS.

The history of the thrifty and prosperous town of New Brighton carries the mind back to a time when no man dare settle on the soil upon which it is now located. Stories of adventure in semi-aboriginal life are not yet unknown, and there are goodly old people yet living whose minds have a vivid recollection of scenes and incidents characteristic of early times, and which show in a marked manner the sturdy character and matchless courage of our town's fathers and mothers. As already shown, its history brings to recollection the expedition of Colonel Boquet, in 1764, and the building of the Block House in 1778. Here the Moravians had to leave their canoes and walk around the falls of Beaver on their way to Coscocksy. The soil was drenched with human blood more than once, in the conflicts between the Indians and whites, and was the theatre of tragedies scarcely excelled on the American continent. Not long after the close of the revolutionary war, men began to turn their attention to the pretty and inviting vales and hills of the present town, and patents were secured for a part of the lands upon which it is situated. It is now situated upon what was in the early history of the lands known as tracts No. 91 to 95 inclusive, owned and settled and improved by an excellent class of men, as follows:

Tract No. 91, comprising that part of the town lying below Block House run, was owned by Mr. Mitchell, one of the eldest settlers in the valley, and upon which there was erected a dwelling situated some place near the present residence of Mr. Bird, on a bluff near the river.

North of this lay tract No. 92, owned by Thomas Lukens, comprising that portion of the town lying below Broadway. Upon this tract Mr. Lukens had a residence on the banks of the Beaver, on a little flat nearly opposite Fallston bridge, being at the foot of the hill upon which the Block House stood. The tract is now covered with the most imposing and beautiful residences in the town, and in all respects probably the most desirable for a good home.

Tract No. 93, lying north of this and composing in great part Broadway street, was patented by the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania in 1786, to Elias Boudinot and William Bradford, the tract being then styled Roxborough. Messrs. Boudinot and Bradford paid the State one hundred and eleven pounds and seven shillings for this large body of land, and it was sold in 1829 for five thousand dollars to Benjamin Sharpless and David Townsend. The same land, exclusive of buildings, might now be bought for the modest sum of \$225,000 per acre, which is perhaps a fair increase in real estate. Upon this tract was a stone house, located a few feet below where Bentley & Gerwig's warehouse now stands. This building was occupied by Isaac Wilson in the beginning of the century, at which time his son, J. W. Wilson, planted in front of the house, on each side of the gate, two locust trees, one of which is now standing, having defied the blasts of Heaven for over sixty years, but is now quietly giving way to the axeman of to-day, that more room may be had for manufacturing. This old relic ought to be sacredly protected and cared for as a reminder of less prosperous days.

Next in order is tract No. 94, which was purchased from Thomas Bradford for \$2,000 in the year 1801, by Benjamin Sharpless and David Townsend. Upon it was located a log house near the canal, in the rear of the present residence of William Kennedy.

Tract No. 95 belonged to Hoopes, Townsend & Co., and upon this tract was built a log house by Joseph T. Townsend, one of the firm, which is yet standing, and is known under the familiar title of the Murray House, or, as formerly styled, "Murray Castle." There was also standing, about the year 1816, a log house occupied by Benjamin Townsend, on the present site of Evan Townsend's residence. These were the only dwelling houses on the site of the town at the time it was surveyed.

THE FIRST SIGN OF BUSINESS LIFE.

Long before a town was either laid out or built, or probably ever thought of, there was put in operation a flouring mill near Patterson's dam, known as Wolf's mill, which was the first mill of any kind on this side of the river, and the only flouring mill for some years in this region. To it with their grain came men from a distance of thirty miles, a fact sufficiently suggestive of the discomfort of the times. There were no well graded roads for travel at that time, but, as was generally the case, a single path large enough for a horse and rider to pass over was the route of transit to the mill. The old mill was run as late as 1820, and stood until the digging of the canal, when it gave way to the demands of commerce.

Some time during the years 1806 and 1807 an attempt was made by a man named Walton to establish a shipyard in the present limits of the town, a short distance below M. O. Kennedy's present residence. His idea was that her material, labor,

living, &c., would be cheap, and that boats and ships could be built much cheaper than at any other point. From here he would float his vessels down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers for use. He tried it, but soon fled to more congenial quarters.

He probably failed to take into account the drawbacks of extremely low water, and the opposite, of the most angry and destructive floods. The town of East Brighton the embryo New Brighton of to-day, was laid out in lots in the spring of 1814. It was surveyed on tract No. 94, then owned by the Messrs. Townsend and Pugh. The occasion of the laying out of this village, the circumstances that gave rise to it, are briefly related as follows:

To meet the demands of a trade then springing into life, it was thought desirable to build a bridge connecting Brighton and these lands. A charter had been procured for that purpose, providing for the erection of a bridge across the waters of the Beaver, to connect Brighton and the site of New Brighton, stipulating that it should be built in front of Brighton, now Beaver Falls. The parties who had the charter desired to build the bridge so that its eastern terminus would be on what is now Bridge street in New Brighton, but were met with the difficulty that in so doing the terminus of the Brighton side would not be in front of Brighton, and hence would violate the express terms of their charter. In order to overcome this difficulty, it was decided to lay out an addition to Brighton on the opposite side of the river, and call it East Brighton. By doing this the eastern end of the bridge would be built in front of Brighton (East) and the terms of the charter complied with. This is the origin of the town, and trivial as it may seem, it is nevertheless a fact and an interesting one. Joseph Hoopes, one of the firm of Hoopes, Townsend & Co., and who owned tract No. 95 adjoining the proposed new town, was employed as Surveyor, and J. W. Wilson was one of the chain carriers.

Mr. Hoopes also made a plot of the town, which is yet preserved by Mr. Wilson. I would suggest to the Young Men's Library Association of New Brighton, that they procure this very interesting old document and frame it for use in their room, I know of nothing more interesting. While in this digression, I would further suggest that they provide a suitable frame for the original patent of the lands of the most prosperous part of the town, which is now in possession of Charles Coale, Esq., and no doubt could be procured for the Library Association.

At the time of the survey, a part of the town was a dense wilderness, covered by red oak and a heavy growth of saplings. In order to get through the woods to carry the chain, Mr. Wilson relates that he was compelled to carry a hatchet and chop the saplings out of his way. The compensation for this work, he says, was the first money he ever earned.

BUYING THE TOWN FOR \$100

At the conclusion of the survey, when stakes had been placed at the corner of each square, and the field laborers, over, the proprietors and workmen were returning along Water street, when Mr. D. Townsend made the Company an offer that he would give one hundred dollars for the right to all the soil from Water street to the Beaver river, consisting of about twenty-five good lots. The proposition was accepted on the part of the other proprietors with cheerfulness. The new town was called East Brighton, and after the lapse of a few years came to be known as New Brighton. An amusing incident is related of this surveying at the expense of Mr. Wilson, which is so very characteristic of the times, that it will bear relating. It is said of Mr. Wilson—and frankly admitted by himself—that at the time referred to he was a very "queer youth," full of curiosity, and uniformly wanted to know the whys and wherefores of events that were transpiring about him. He was very much interested in the workings of the compass, and had a great desire to understand the mechanism of it. He was standing by the instrument—close by a pine tree which formed the corner of tracts No. 94 and 95—closely examining its various points and fully absorbed in it, when, to his great astonishment, he received a stunning blow on the side of face, which sent him reeling several feet distant. Recovering himself he returned to the tree and found David Townsend standing by the compass. Mr. Wilson at once inquired why he had been treated in such a summary manner, and, anxious to establish his innocence added, "I didn't touch the instrument," repeating the words two or three times. Mr. Townsend kept him in suspense for some time, and at his leisure turned to Mr. Wilson and asked him if he knew why he had struck him. A negative answer was given and another disclaimer put, in that he had done nothing deserving such treatment, when Townsend informed him that he had struck him to fully impress upon his mind the fact, "that that little pine tree was the corner of tracts No. 94 and 95."

Mr. Wilson has never forgotten, but after an experience of over sixty years, he does not by any means recommend this practice as a means of improving the memory. The bridge connecting the two towns was built, and stood until the year 1818, when it was swept away by the breaking up of the ice. At that

time there was not the least probability of breaking up the ice in progress down stream, and thus broken to pieces and shorn off its terribly destructive power. Upon this occasion, there had been extraordinary heavy snows and hard freezing, and when the spring rains and thaw came, the melting of the snow and the rains swelled the river to an unprecedented fury, and acres of ice were swept down the river in one solid cake, by the resistless current, which, in its onward, mighty, and rapid flow, swept away the piers of the bridge and carried the bridge with it into the whirling rapids below.

A Ponderous Slipper.

George has for some time past been attentive to a young lady in Michigan street, whom he has noticed on several evenings when he called, busily engaged on a beautiful piece of embroidery, which, perhaps accidentally, or, comparing it with the size of his own foot, he had concluded was one of a pair of slippers that were, no doubt, intended for a holiday present; and George had once or twice allowed himself to wander into the pleasant suspicion that they were intended for him, although nothing had really transpired to justify such a belief. On Friday evening George called for the third time during the week. He's quite attentive, it would seem, and, as usual, the slipper was progressing finely. He was fully sure the slippers were intended for him, but he was anxious to draw the acknowledgment from the dear angel who was laboring so industriously for his benefit, another implied acknowledgment of her devotion for him. Of course, he began cautiously:

"Some one you are mighty fond of is to become the possessor of those slippers, I imagine?" said he. "What slippers do you refer to?" inquired the fair laborer. "Why, those you are working on so industriously," replied George. "Slippers!" shouted his astonished companion. "Slippers! Do you mean to tell me, George, that you took this for a slipper?"

"Why not," returned George, inadvertently moving one of his ponderous pedal appendages. The movement, though unintentional, drew the lady's close attention to George's feet, where she gazed a moment and then at the supposed slippers; then, raising her eyes to our hero, she said: "Well, George, you are not so much to blame after all; but this was really intended for a sofa cushion."

George takes but little pleasure in hearing the incident related, but he declares he got his foot in it—though not in the slipper.

In Search of his Wife.

A few days ago a man who seemed to be laboring under considerable excitement, appeared at the office of the Crawford House, Cincinnati, and inquired of the clerk in attendance:

"Is my wife here?" The clerk told him there were several ladies stopping at the hotel. "What was his wife's name?" "No matter about the name," said the man; "she's so contrary she would register some other name, like as any way." The clerk suggested that he might describe her.

"Well, p'raps I might. She is rather short; has red hair, and is a little freckled. Her nose turns up, too." He was informed that no lady of that description was stopping at the house.

"Well, look a-here Mr. Clerk," said the wife-pursuer, after pondering on the subject, "that ere woman is cunning as a fox. She has dyed her hair, like as any way, and got something to take the freckles off; but I'd know that nose—she couldn't get the turn out of that nose, shure."

He peeped into the dining room a few moments, and walked off, muttering to himself: "She's just the contrariest woman. Dye her hair in a minute to fool me."

—Best size for a man—Exercise. —A good side show—A pretty cheek. —The noisiest body of water—A sound. —Sweeter than a moonlight night—Nitro. —A draw game—The soda-water business. —Impecunious animals—Those who haven't a scent. —Does "horse milliners" include the "ribbons."

—The man that "sticks" to his business —The drummer. —Could a temperance oration be called a water-spout. —Town committees on high weights are not necessarily fat men. —A well-dressed dog wears a collar, and pants in the summer.

—Policemen say the best way to smooth a rough is to iron him. —When a man is dead and can't we read his words, "I will," &c. —The best sewing-machine attachment—The engagement of a seamstress. —Can an edifice that weighs two hundred and fifty tons be properly called a light house?

—A blessed old lady being asked if she ever had her ears pierced by the wall of distress, said she couldn't very well remember, but she believed it was done with a fork.

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