



Historic QUAKERTOWN

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February 2022 Newsletter

Dear Quakertown Historical Society Members,

Here we are in the middle of February and looking forward to the end of winter and the start of spring and warmer temperatures. Can't wait!!

The Board of Directors of the Society met on February 9th, and we have a few items to share.

A plaque has been purchased honoring Bill Amey, arguably the visionary that began what ultimately became the Historical Society. It will be hung in a very conspicuous place in the Burgess Foulke House entrance.

A marker will be ordered and placed on a property on S. Main Street honoring Henry Franklin, a man who was a refugee slave from the south using the Underground Railroad as an escape route. He settled in Quakertown and worked for Richard Moore in his pottery works. The "planting" of the marker by way of a celebration will be held later this year with more details of that event forthcoming.

A fundraising dinner remembering the Titanic will be held on April 23, 2022 at McCoolle's Arts & Events Place. Renowned expert Craig Sopin will be the guest speaker. The dinner has a very limited space and when the tickets went on sale, it was sold out almost immediately. We had hoped that there would be a demand for tickets, but we were caught off guard with how quickly tickets were no longer available. We sincerely apologize to those of you who had wished to attend and cannot but, at this point, it is our plan do a repeat dinner and later this year and hope you will be a part of it. More details to follow.

We hope you find the two attached articles interesting and informative.

The first is an article on the Fries (pronounced frees) Rebellion, which took place in 1798-99 and, in which, Quakertown played a prominent role.

The second is a short article on what was, at the time, called the Red Lion Hotel. A more complete history of the Hotel will follow at a later date.

Angry Taxpayers, U.S. Clashed in Fries Rebellion

By Frank Whelan

As It Appeared in the Sunday Call-Chronicle

November 25, 1984

Even in a state as saturated with history as Pennsylvania, the Lehigh Valley has more than its share.

For those seeking a colonial past, there are Trout Hall, the Taylor House, and historic Bethlehem. The Lockridge furnace and the Saylor Cement Museum offer an industrial historian a look at the roots of the industrial revolution. And a walk through any older Allentown street can tell us a great deal about how our 19th century ancestors felt about architecture.

But it is the little sidelights of the past that can be the most interesting. Among them is that mix of taxpayer's revolt and small farmers insurrection that shook the Lehigh Valley some 190 years ago. It has

several names. Some call it the Hot Water War, others the Milford Rebellion. Most know it as the Fries Rebellion of 1798-99.

To understand the Fries Rebellion, it's necessary to take a look at the state of the nation and indeed the world as the 18th century was coming to its end. The United States, then age 22, had a constitution that was just shy of 10 years old. Many living Americans at the time could remember when they were loyal subjects of King George III. The Revolution was not musty documents and heroic statues, but a memory of events they had seen.

At the capital in Philadelphia, President John Adams struggled to hold together a nation that was not yet used to acting as one. Beset by foes both foreign and domestic, including some in his own Federalist party, it was understandable that Adams might have felt besieged. Monarchical England and revolutionary France were locked in a struggle for control of the sea.

Both sides preyed on American shipping. The conservative Federalist party, long a foe of France, was divided on what action to take. Adams' more moderate faction sought negotiation; others, the so-called High Federalists led by Alexander Hamilton, wanted the United States to join with Britain in war against France. At the same time, the Democratic Republicans headed by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison backed France.

But the last straw was broken in 1798 when French foreign minister Tallyrand told a group of American negotiators, through three intermediaries known only as X, Y, and Z., that they would have to pay him a bribe before he would agree to talk.

The Americans, who were not averse to paying a bribe after the talks, refused to pay just to start them. U.S. Minister to France Charles Cotesworth Pinckney was outraged. "No! No! Not a sixpence!" he shouted. When word reached America about these events, the country was electrified. Most Americans felt the nation had been insulted. Pinkney's words, freely changed by a magazine editor into "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute!" became a rallying cry.

The country was caught up in an anti-French frenzy. Congress responded by passing a series of laws designed to restrict foreign entities, i.e. French, immigration and stifle any dissent against the government. Known collectively as the Alien and Sedition Acts, these laws put rigid restrictions on free press and free speech.

But "millions for defense" was a little bit more difficult to come by than at first had been suspected. The Adams administration sought to raise money to increase the size of the Army and Navy by the only way governments know how – increase taxes. Hoping to raise \$2 million, the government allocated to each state an amount they expected them to raise. Pennsylvania's was \$237,177.72.

Various parts of the state were divided into assessment districts and commissioners were appointed. They in turn subdivided the district and appointed assessors. It would be the assessors' task to travel to the citizens' houses and set a tax based on the value of property.

The government had not reckoned with the reaction its tax package would receive among the Pennsylvania Germans. In the 1790's the area 50 miles to the north of the capital city seemed, to some Philadelphians, the edge of civilization. Except for Bethlehem's Moravians, Philadelphians regarded the rest of the Pennsylvania-Germans with disdainful condescension, if not outright prejudice.

Perhaps the attitude was best summed up by a young Scotch-Irish Army officer who wrote of them in the 1770's: "They appeared to me like to any human beings scarcely endowed with qualifications equal to that of the brute species ... I therefore concluded that they were devoid of any qualification calculated to complete happiness unless when blended with others equally ignorant with themselves."

Never attempting to understand the powerful ties that held the Pennsylvania Germans together or the roots of a culture different from their own, the government sent its tax assessors to work. But even before they started, rumors of this tax were circulating in Montgomery, Bucks and Northampton counties. Among those most concerned about the tax was a 50-year-old auctioneer named John Fries.

Fries was about as unlikely a rebel as one could imagine. A federalist by political background, he had served with honor in both the American Revolution and in the suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion by western Pennsylvania farmers in 1794. He traveled about the three-county area with his trusty little black dog "Whiskey" at his side.

Fries knew a great number of people and was trusted by them. As he traveled, he picked up the feeling that people did not trust this intrusion of the federal government into their lives. Familiar with the gross abuses

of Europe's tax collectors and having fought less than 20 years before in a revolution against taxes, they were in no mood to put up with outsiders coming in to levy a tax.

In this atmosphere, rumors took on a life of their own. One had it that President Adams was about to marry his daughter to a son of England's hated King George III and create an American dynasty. Another was that George Washington himself was opposed to the tax. Tempers were short, and by the time it came around to collecting the tax, the border area of what is now Lehigh, Bucks, and Montgomery counties was raw human tinder ready for a match.

With his friends Frederick Heaney and John Getman, Fries set about arousing the countryside to the arrival of tax men. From Trumbauersville to Milford Square and on to Quakertown and every hamlet and farm to the north, the news spread like a brushfire. The friends talked to everyone they could, warning them to keep the assessors out. When some of the tax men arrived, they were greeted by women who poured hot water on their heads. In other cases, gun-toting farmers warned them off the property.

The assessors soon realized they were getting no place. James Chapman, principal assessor for Richland, called for a meeting at the tavern of one George Mitchell on a Saturday at the end of February 1799. It was hoped that once the people had the tax law explained to them, they would calm down and submit to it. But it was not to be that easy. Although John Fries was not present, the room was full of those who supported him. As Chapman described it later, the scene was bedlam.

"I got there between one and two o'clock. Just as I got to the house, before I went in, I saw ten or twelve people coming ... about the half of them were armed and the others with sticks. I went into the house and twenty or thirty were there. I sat talking with some of my acquaintances that were disposed to the laws. Conrad Marks, (a rebellion leader) talked a great deal in German ... They were making a great noise, huzzaing for liberty and Democracy, damning the Tories and the like ... No offer was made to explain the law to them while I said, they did not seem disposed to hear it."

Tax-supporter Israel Roberts later made an attempt to read the tax law to those assembled. When one of the tax protesters asked him what he was doing, Roberts said he just wanted to explain the law.

"He looked me in the face," Roberts recounted later, "and said 'We don't want any of your damned laws; we have laws of our own.' And he shook the muzzle of his musket in my face saying, 'This is our law, and we will let you know it.' There were four or five who wished to hear it, (the tax law) but others forbade it, and said it should not be read, and it was not done."

Despite the opposition they encountered, the assessors started in again. But the people were more militant than ever. A company of the militia was called up to drive out the tax people. They marched with fife and drum and attracted about 100 men who followed. Some of these later claimed that they joined up because all of their friends were doing so, and they didn't want to be left out.

As the assessors were meeting at (now newly named) Jacob Fries Inn at Trumbauersville, they must have been surprised to see Jacob's brother John walk in the tavern door. John Fries went up to James Chapman and, in a perfectly normal tone, exchanged with him the compliments of the day. John Fries apologized to Chapman for the insults he had received at the hands of the mob. He told the assessor it would never have happened if he had been present.

"I told him," recounted Chapman later, "I thought they were very wrong in opposing the law as they did," Fries disagreed and when Chapman pointed out the assessment was inevitable, the tax rebel exclaimed, "My God! If I were to send that man (pointing to one) to my house to let them know they are taking the rates there would be five or seven hundred men under arms here tomorrow by sunrise." Chapman reiterated his statement, adding that the government would use force if necessary to enforce the law. Fries replied "Huzza! Then it shall be as it is in France," and walked out the door.

It would be easy to see why John Fries felt so confident. The tax revolt now took in almost all of Northampton County. In the townships of Heidelberg, Weisenberg, Lynn, Lowhill, Penn, Moore, Upper Milford, and Hamilton, opposition was solid. Several of the assessors approached Northampton County Tax Commissioner Jacob Eyerly and asked to quit. He calmed them down and told them they could not resign.

When Federal Marshall Samuel Nichols arrived from Philadelphia, he and his men went out and arrested some of the most vocal of the tax protesters from the Nazareth area and locked them up in Bethlehem's Sun Inn. This enflamed the countryside.

Fries, now elevated to the rank of captain, marched with his men to South Bethlehem. Here he was to meet men from Northampton County. Marshall Nichols had heard rumors that they were coming. Still, he must have been surprised when two armed men showed up at the inn's barroom. Under questioning, they declared they "had come upon a shooting frolic." Disturbed at this reply, he quickly had them locked up with the other prisoners.

Aware by this time that a force of tax rebels was forming at the bridge, the Marshall sent out a delegation to meet them. Although Fries had not arrived, the Northampton County men were already gathered. After conferring with Marshall's representatives, the men at the bridge quickly assembled their own delegation and sent it up the hill to the Sun Inn.

After a brief meeting, the Marshall agreed to release the two men who had come into the barroom that morning. But he refused to let any of his other prisoners go. As the Northampton County delegation was returning, Fries and his men were arriving at the bridge. He quickly convinced the Northampton men to join him on the march. One hundred and forty strong, they proceeded up the streets of Bethlehem toward the courtyard of the Sun Inn. Dressed in full militia uniforms, the rebel cavalry, with drawn sabers at their side, rode in disciplined order two abreast. Behind them came the infantrymen in single file.

Standing at the door of the Sun Inn, his force of 140 men filling the courtyard, Fries demanded the release of the prisoners. The Marshall, with his 18-man force, still refused to let them go. Fries' men began shouting that the prisoners must be released. They pressed against the building, forcing their way in the front door. Fries told his men not to shoot first. After a brief tussle, the Marshall and his posse forced them out. Angry, the rebels pushed forward again, this time with their guns pointed.

Still, Marshall Nichols refused to give up his prisoners. Although the posse was wondering if they would get out alive, the Marshall announced his determination to take his charges to Philadelphia. If the mob attacked, he declared, the guilt would be theirs. Finally, a distraught member of the posse broke and began to scream at Nichols. "For God's sake" let the men go. Realizing that it was not just his own life but the lives of others that he had to worry about, Nichols reluctantly agreed to turn the prisoners over to Fries. Once released, they returned home; the rebel force broke up and in less than a half hour there was not a uniform to be seen.

As far as John Fries and his friends were concerned, that was the end of it. What they did not know was that the highest councils of their country's government had taken more than passing notice of their action. Federalist Philadelphia was in an uproar, demanding that these Pennsylvania Germans be taught a thing or two. Alexander Hamilton, never hesitant to give advice to the Adams administration, declared, "Whenever the government appears in arms, it ought to appear like Hercules and inspire respect by a show of strength."

President Adams, convinced that the Fries Rebellion was part of a larger conspiracy by either the French or the High Federalists who wanted to embarrass him, showed Hamilton that he could be a Hercules. He issued a proclamation designed to crush the rebellion. An armed force of 500 militia and regular troops was ordered into Northampton County. It cost the government the then-enormous sum of \$80,000 to get this force together, but it turned out to be worse than useless. In the words of historian John C. Miller, "The worst the army encountered was blank looks from the country people."

By the time the army arrived, most of the Pennsylvania Germans were no longer opposed to the tax. Local leaders, who had not been consulted when the plan was first proposed, had since been reassured by the assessors that the law was not unjust.

If everyone was not happy with the tax, at least they were resigned to paying it. John Fries, who later told friends he had perhaps acted in haste, went back to his auction block. It was while he was happily knocking down an item to the highest bidder that he got word that the army wanted to arrest him for treason. Fries fled from the troops and hid in the woods. He might have been safe there but for the tell-tale presence of his dog "Whiskey" which gave his hiding place away. Along with Frederick Heaney and John Getman, Fries was taken to Philadelphia to be tried for treason.

The trial of John Fries has been poured over by historians for years. Most admit that it was a travesty of justice. The government tried to show that Fries and his fellows were in violation of both the treason clause of the Constitution and the Sedition Act. Fries' lawyers attempted to prove that although he might be guilty under the Sedition Act, Fries had not committed treason. Long drawn-out arguments over the treason clause, common law, and English law filled the air.

The jury found Fries guilty, but just as the judge was about to announce the sentencing, Fries' lawyers protested that one of the jurors had been prejudiced against Fries even before trial began.

Once more Fries and his friends had to go through a trial. This too resulted in conviction. When it was all over, Judge Samuel Chase, after giving Fries a vicious tongue-lashing, pronounced sentencing. "The judgement of the law is, and this Court does award that you be hanged by the neck until dead; and I pray God Almighty to be merciful to your soul." Fries is said to have fainted on hearing these words.

Fries knew that his last hope was to petition the president. He appealed to the chief executive for clemency. After consulting with those around him, most of whom said Fries should hang, John Adams acted. He issued a full pardon to all those who took part in the tax rebellion and then issued a special pardon that dropped the sentence against Fries, Heaney, and Getman.

Adams had several reasons for his actions. He wrote to one friend that the men should be forgiven because they were "miserable Germans, all ignorant of our language as they were of our laws." He also feared they were being made scapegoats for some scheme of deeper conspiracy. "Pitiful puppets," he called them, "danced upon the wire of jugglers behind the scene or underground."

Despite Adams' suspicion, no larger conspiracy in Fries Rebellion has ever been discovered. It was, however, a striking example of what happens when a government fails to communicate with the people it governs. Fries and his friends returned to their quiet lives with no interest in repeating their brief appearance on the national stage.

Fries died in 1818 and was laid to rest in Trumbauersville's cemetery without a tombstone. But perhaps the best epitaph he could have had is that he tried to keep an infant democracy true to its ideals.

Red Lion Hotel As appeared in the Bucks County Traveler October 1950

The Red Lion Hotel in Quakertown was built about 1747. Historical records show that Walter McCoolle was operating the inn in 1750 and as late as 1770. Colonel Jacob Savitz was the proprietor during the Revolutionary War.

Originally the Red Lion was a two-story stone structure with a fireplace in each room and constituted only that part now occupied by the present dining room and kitchen. There is no record when it was made into a three-story building and the addition to the south, now the tap room, added. But this was done no doubt by Enoch Roberts when he purchased the inn.

At one time the Red Lion had a special column in the guest register for registering horses and guests were required to state the number of horses stabled in the large shed that stood to the south and adjoining the inn.

A high board fence ran along the road to a building where the Pontiac agency now stands. A large gate opened in the center to allow the stages and other vehicles to enter. The fire that destroyed the horse shed is still remembered by some of the older citizens.

It is the only survivor of the five old inns that were operated between Philadelphia and Bethlehem during the early period. The Red Lion has clung steadfastly to its name and has remained the Red Lion under successive owners. Its importance in early days providing meals, lodging, and refreshments for dusty, bewigged travelers was because of its location.

At the crossroads where it stood the wayfarer could turn toward Philadelphia, Hellertown, Durham, Doylestown, and other destinations. But that meals have been served there for more than 200 years is unquestioned. John Tillger, an experienced hotel man and caterer is the present host.