



Historic QUAKERTOWN

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October 2022 Newsletter

Hello Members,

As you read this, we are in fall and winter is just around the corner. Some of you are looking forward to the winter months and others...not so much! While it has been drought like, it has been a good summer and fall.

We want to remind you that the Annual Meeting of the Quakertown Historical Society will take place on October 19, 2022 at McCooles Arts & Events Place, 10 S. Main Street, Quakertown, Pa. at 7:00 PM. Along with the election of two directors to fill three-year terms, there will be a report on board activity for the year 2022, a financial report, and an outlook given concerning 2023. We hope to see you there.

Attached is an essay written by Helen Shilling in 1977 summarizing how the Borough of Quakertown came to be and what was, at the time, some of the businesses located in the Borough. We hope you find it enlightening.

Development of Richland Centre and Downtown Quakertown **By Helen Shilling** **Circa 1977**

A number of friends still live in Quakertown who are descendants of the early Irish, Welsh, and English Quakers but the great majority of the population is Pennsylvania German, descendants of the emigrants from the Palatinate in Germany in the eighteenth century drawn by William Penn's promise of religious freedom and rich farmland. Most of them settled in Milford Township and Richland Centre.

The Mennonites came to the Great Swamp in 1717. They were led by Valentine Clemmer who settled in Milford Township and became the minister of the First Mennonite Church.

W.H. Davis, in his History of Bucks County states, "We have been able to get little information of the Germans who first settled in Richland. Many of them have great numbers of descendants who can trace ancestry back to Jacob Musselman, Samuel Yoder, Johannes Landis, Jacob Klein, John Klemmer, Michael and Joe Everhart, John Biehn, Henry Walp, Ahlum, Diehl, Freed, Aaron Artman and Heinrich Ditterly," evidently Deaterly.

They settled east of the North Penn Railroad station. The oldest house is 405 East Broad Street. It was the farmhouse of Benjamin Foulke. John Strawn and Joel Roberts were the original owners of the land around the railroad station.

Richland Centre was a separate town until 1874 when it was incorporated into the borough of Quakertown.

In 1869, the residents of Richland Centre petitioned the Postal Department in Washington for a post office. Therefore, the Department issued an order for the removal of the uptown post office to downtown. This caused vigorous protest from the uptown residents who petitioned Washington for the return of their post office to its previous site. After five weeks, Washington returned the post office and reinstated Mrs. Mary Ochs as postmistress. Location of this post office was 22 S. Main Street.

The first post office in Richland Centre was in Tobias Shive's old store at the northeast corner of Hellertown Avenue and East Broad Street. Ephraim L. Cope was the first postmaster in 1867.

William Dietz opened the first bakery in 1868 on the site across from Headman's Meat Store.

The completion of the North Penn Railroad in 1856 increased the population and material wealth of Richland Centre and downtown Quakertown.

In 1870 the population of this part was 863. In 1880 it numbered over 1626.

In the early 1900's there were twenty-four stores and twenty industrial plants. It kept pace with the most prosperous sections of Bucks County.

The factories included a number of cigar factories of which H. Sommer Company and Attrato were the last survivors of what had been the leading industry.

Other factories included Eagle silk, Transue's and Stoneback's planing mills, clothing, and Victor box company.

People of Quakertown can be justly proud of the industries that not only prospered but their products were shipped to many places.

One of these was the Durner Organ Company. In 1861 the first pipe organ was built in Quakertown by Charles Frederick Durner. It was powered by foot because its inventor couldn't afford to install steam power. It took one year to be constructed and it was valued at \$750. In 1880 Charles Edward, son of the inventor, learned the trade with his father at the factory on the corner of Front and Juniper Streets. There was a great demand for the Durner organ. Business developed so that by 1905, the organ factory in Quakertown was one of the largest, best equipped, and most prosperous factories in Pennsylvania. There are many Durner organs in our country.

Another important industry was the Quakertown Stove Works established in 1882 and first operated by Roberts, Scypes and Company, manufacturers of ranges, stoves, and heaters. The plant was located on the north side of W. Broad Street between Fourth and Third Streets. This was one of Quakertown's most important industries for many years. Parlor stoves ranged in size from small to large. They had nickel trim and many little isinglass windows with a nickel rail around the base which was very good for warming feet. All the more ornate stoves were finished with a little urn on top.

In 1899 the stove works were destroyed by fire. When the plant was rebuilt, the facilities were expanded so that operation on a much larger scale was possible. The firm was then known as Roberts Winner and Company. Some years later, it was incorporated and operated as the Quakertown Stove Works. They established a branch office on North Second Street in Philadelphia.

The Quaker "Beechwood" Range and the "Colonial" were the two most popular models. Some of the smaller types known as egg stoves and little laundry stoves with one or two lids are now collector's items. After 1920 the foundry discontinued operating, but the business made gas ranges. Upon the death of Joseph Roberts, the last heir of the original founder was gone.

Another industry has become well known and is still operating. It grew from a small to a very large business.

In 1902 Edward W. Knauss, father of Mrs. Paul Deaterly and Mrs. Martha Peters, bought the meat business of George White, the grandfather of Leonard White.

It was in a small frame building where Headman's meat market is located. A route was conducted by horse and wagon. Slaughtering and dressing of the beef was done on North Ninth Street.

Mr. Knauss bought the Reichenbach farm about 1910, the site of the present processing plant of E. W. Knauss and Son Inc. at 625 East Broad Street. The original plant was in a barn which was replaced by the modern brick building.

Mr. Knauss and his son William became specialists in the processing of ham and dried beef. Today Donald and William Knauss' grandson and great grandson of Mr. Edward Knauss are the wholesale specialists in dried beef. They are supplying customers from near and far.

A poor beginning became a successful business. James Ebbert was so interested in the background of the K. & L. Company Inc. that he checked the deeds to the property.

Here is a summary of the research. Approximately in 1840 a saw and planning mill was on the site. It was owned by John Trumbower and operated by his sons, David and Jeremiah.

After ownership changed hands seven times the Sheriff in 1877 deeded the property to Joseph and Sarah Thomas.

In 1878 they deeded the property to Aaron B. Walp, a shoe manufacturer who conveyed the property to David L. Ambler and Norman Stoneback. The business was known as Ambler's coal and lumber yard.

Six years later Aaron B. Walp bought Stoneback's and Ambler's shares. Mr. Walp sold the property to Charles and Mary Walp, grandparents of Charles Walp, and to Tilgman and Laura Walp in 1910. For seventeen years Walp's Coal & Lumber yard did an excellent business.

In 1927 the name was again changed to K. & L. Company upon the purchase by Burton A. Knerr and Gordon H. Luckenbill.

In 1946 the business was incorporated, and the name remained the same. Ten years later James C. Ebbert bought half of the issued stock. After the death of Rachel H. Knerr in 1965 the remaining stockholders absorbed her holdings. Dependable and courteous service has been rendered for many years from the Walps to the K. & L. Company Inc.

Another very important industry and everyone took pride in was The Quakertown Municipal Electric Light Plant.

Prior to 1892 the lighting in streets was provided by about a dozen oil amps mounted on poles in front of residences whose owner could afford to maintain them.

Nights were very dark.

Finally, the citizens decided to end the danger and inconvenience. Considerable discussion was held over whether to light by electricity or acetylene.

One fact helped to make the decision. Gottlieb Frey, then an employee of Transue's planning mill built a bi-polar Edison D.C. Generator. It was capable of lighting ten lamps of about one hundred watts each, or one arc lamp of 110 volts.

Much interest was shown by the influential citizens and members of Council. Public opinion finally demanded action which ended in the calling for an election on Tuesday, February 6, 1892. An electric light and water tax of eight mills was voted by 274, a majority of 171.

At this time the members of council were Leidy W. Stoneback, Harry C. Stout, Aaron B. Walp, Henry H. Souder, Thomas Strawn, and Percival K. Gable, the president. J. Levi Heacock was Burgess. Members of Council visited electric light plants in Allentown, Bethlehem, and other places.

Shortly after Levi Heacock presented specifications for dynamos, line work, and machinery. Authorization to advertise for bids followed.

Location of the plant caused much discussion and disagreement. But Burgess Heacock cast the deciding vote for the Borough lot near Fourth Street recently purchased from William Miniger. In order to have plenty of room for the plant and other necessary buildings Levi Heacock purchased the Anthony Goldsmith lot for \$100 and deeded it to the Borough.

On August 22, 1892 M.H. Biehn's bid of \$3,447. The lowest, was accepted for the building of a brick structure.

Gottlieb Frey was elected superintendent at a salary of \$15 per week. Edwin Frey, his son, was elected assistant engineer and fireman. A month later Frank B. Nairch was elected lineman.

Charges were computed at so much per light – first light 60 cents, second light 50 cents, third light 40 cents, fifth or over 25 cents. Quakertown National Bank bought the bonds and citizens were invited to buy them at par from January 2, 1893 to May 1, 1893. The balance were held by the bank for its control.

The first current for private homes was furnished in January, 1895. There were many applications for the two-hundred-ten lights that were available.

By 1893 meters were installed in residences and stores.

Percival Gable, proprietor of Red Lion Hotel, displayed a lighted Christmas tree with twelve incandescent bulbs.

About this time the Pennsylvania Power and Light Company made an offer to buy the electric plant. Council and townspeople were opposed. By 1900 receipts exceeded expenditures.

It is believed there were approximately four offers made but as late as 1931 the motion was unanimously adopted "That this nor any future Borough Council will not have the power to sell our municipal electric plant unless the same is approved by a majority vote of the taxpayers cast at a regular election."

There are many personas connected with the operation of the plant, but space does not permit the listing of all of their names. James B. Taylor succeeded Mr. Frey in 1914. George E. Willard succeeded Mr. Taylor in 1917. Mr. James Parker became superintendent in 1919, his salary was raised to thirty-five dollars per week to take effect January 1, 1920. In about a year's time Mr. Parker had demonstrated his ability, not only to run the plant effectively, but to make it a paying business.

While The Quakertown National Bank is the oldest bank in the upper end of the county, it is not. However, the first bank to have done business in Quakertown. Interesting facts have been discovered about the development of banking in Quakertown.

In 1865, an unsuccessful attempt was made to organize the First National Bank when one hundred and ten thousand dollars of stock had been subscribed for and a committee was sent to Washington, D.C. to secure a charter. This committee was composed of Dr. Samuel G. Bradshaw and Mr. Benjamin G. Foulke, the former having been elected president of the proposed bank. Both men served later as directors of The Doylestown National Bank. Five years later, however, in the spring of 1870, Dr. R.J. Linderman, who represented Bucks County in the Pennsylvania senate, was successful in securing a charter for a State Bank.

The General Assembly Act created a corporation by the name of the Quakertown Savings Bank of Bucks County.

The Savings Bank remained on the northwest corner of Main and West Broad Streets until 1872. It was then moved to number 312 building on West Broad. It was purchased from the sons of Herman Lodge. The bank had a very short but very successful career of about seven years. All the liabilities were met, and a substantial dividend was paid to its stockholders.

On July 21, 1877 a charter was issued to the Quakertown National Bank. All the officers of the Savings Bank were elected officers or directors of the National Bank. The building occupied by the Savings Bank was now used by the latter bank.

The officers were Dr. Joseph G. Thomas, president, Charles Fellman, vice president, Charles C. Haring, cashier, and Benjamin H. Grant, teller.

Business began on August 15, 1877.

Benjamin H. Grant resigned in 1883 and he was succeeded by Byron Thomas, who continued in this position until his death in 1923, having served the bank for forty years.

Charles C. Haring was one of our town's most respected citizens. His advice and counsel were quite frequently sought. He devoted fifty-six years of continuous service with the institution he loved so dearly. He was president from 1909 to 1933.

In 1902 the residence of William B. Moyer on the southwest corner of West Broad and Third Streets was purchased. On its site a new bank building was built in 1903. In 1952 an addition to the building was made. Modernization of interior was also completed.

The National Bank officials for a number of years recognized the need for an institution with trust powers to serve properly the community. It was impossible for a National Bank to secure such powers at that time. In 1904 the Quakertown Trust Company was established. Mr. James S. Harley, one of the directors of Quakertown National Bank was elected president – while Dr. Joseph G. Thomas, president, Aaron B. Walp, vice-president, and Charles C. Haring, cashier, were elected directors of the newly organized Trust Company. It occupied the building in which the National Bank started business, now the Free Press building.

It would seem from these facts that the Savings Bank was really the forerunner of the Quakertown National Bank, and the Trust Company was an outgrowth of the National Bank.

In 1902 the Merchants National Bank was established.

Banking facilities were slow in development in a town settled by thrifty Quakers and Germans. The three banks and others which followed have prospered and rendered a great service to the industrial growth and stability of the community.

Uriah S. Stauffer's article in the June 25, 1931 issue of the Quakertown Free Press discloses interesting facts.

In 1881 John G. Stauffer who had been publishing a German newspaper in Milford Square, purchased the job printing office in Quakertown of Milton G. Oberholtzer. Mr. Stauffer moved into the second floor of postmaster Joseph Hill's brick building on West Broad Street. The post office was on the first floor. Charles Texter's drug store later occupied the first floor.

The first issue which was dated August 31, 1881, contained four pages. Six columns of print were on each page. The policy of the paper appeared, stating independence but neutrality upon leading political issues.

During the next six months the Free Press became very popular. Mr. Stauffer who had continued the printing of his German and English religious papers realized he had too much to do. So, he offered to sell the Free Press and job printing to Uriah S. Stauffer.

The transfer was made and the first issue under the new ownership was dated July 8, 1882.

The Free Press prospered to such an extent that a larger building was needed. In 1901 a new location was found and a brick house and business building were built at 305 and 307 West Broad Street.

In 1917 the Free Press with the entire printing outfit was purchased by Charles M. Meredith, the grandfather of Charles M. Meredith III.

It was soon realized more space was needed. The old Quakertown National Bank building was purchased. The building was enlarged, and new equipment was purchased.

In 1922 the Free Press was published in its new home.

Three generations have owned this paper. Good news and good coverage have been the aim. It has become a daily paper except for Saturday and Sunday. It is in its ninety-sixth year serving Upper Bucks, Southern Lehigh, and Upper Perkiomen.