LITTLESTOWN
Bicentennial

Second Section

Brief History Of Littlestown

Bicentennial Plate

LITTLESTOWN IS situated in the southern part of Adams County, about two miles from the Mason and Dixon line, and is one of the oldest towns in the county. It is in what was formerly Germany Township, and is 635 feet above sea level, 82 feet higher than the center of Gettysburg.

The land adjoining Littlestown was the boundary of the disputed tract known as "Digges Choice." In 1727, a warrant was issued to John Digges, an Englishman, by the Maryland authorities for a tract of 6,822 acres, which embraced Conewago Township and a part of Germany Township, then in Lancaster County, but which were supposed to be in the County of Baltimore, in the province of Maryland. This land was surveyed in 1732.

During the summer of 1739, the Lancaster court directed a road to be opened upon the petition of numerous settlers west of the Susquehanna. The viewers to locate this road were Joshua Minshall, Francis Worley, Henry Hendricks, Christian Crawl, Michael Tanner and Woolrich Whisler. The road began between the lands of John Wright Jr. and Samuel Taylor (now Wrightsville); thence to Big Codorus (York not laid out), continuing to Adam Forney's land (now Hanover); thence to the provincial line between Pennsylvania and Maryland and extended to Frederick.

USED BY GEN. WAYNE

Known as the Monocacy road, it soon became a prominent highway of travel to the south and southwest. This route was taken by General Wayne on his trip with his First Brigade of American soldiers to Yorktown, Va., during the Revolution, and the route used for transporting Hessian and British soldiers to Maryland and Virginia during the same war. Martin Houser took out warrants for land along this road, July 2, 1741, and July 2, 1743, which afterwards were assigned to Peter Little, whose name in the vernacular was "Klein," to whom a patent for 311 acres was granted by the Penns, September 18, 1760.

In 1765, Peter Little divided his land into 48 lots, arranging them in consecutive order. This was 16 years after York County was separated from Lancaster County, and 35 years before Adams County was formed from part of York County. It was two years after the organization of St. John's Lutheran Church, in 1763, and 18 years after the founding of Christ Church, May 4, 1747, by the Rev. Michael Schlatter. Hanover is one year older, having been laid out in 1764 by Richard McAllister, and for a long time was known as McAllister's Town.

THIRD OLDEST BOROUGH

Of Adams County's 11 boroughs, Littlestown shares with McSherrystown, according to some records, the honor of being the third oldest. Abbottstown was founded in 1753 by John Abbott, and East Berlin was founded in 1764 by John Frankenberger.

A 1914 newspaper states that Littlestown was founded 1765 by Peter Little and McSherrystown in 1765 by Patrick McSherry. Other records place McSherrystown first. Gettysburg followed in 1780 by James Gettys, New Oxford in 1792 by Henry Kuhn, York Springs in 1800, Fairfield in 1801 by William Miller, Arendtsville in 1808 by John Arendt, Biglerville in 1817 by S. White and Bendersville in 1832 by Jacob and Harry Bender.

Gettysburg, the county seat, was the first town to be incorporated as a borough in 1807, Abbottstown as Berwick borough, second in 1835; Littlestown, third in 1864; followed by York Springs in 1869, New Oxford in 1874, East Berlin in 1880 and others at a later date.

FIRST LOT OWNERS

Among the first owners of lots in Littlestown were Peter Cushwa, Matthias Baker, Stephen Geiss, Henry Brothers, R. McIlhenny, Jacob Gray, John Alspach, Michael Reed, Peter Baker, D. Zackery, Dysert Little, Will, Sell, Hostetter, Staley, Crouse, Long, Kuntz and others. Many of the descendants of these ancestors are today among Littlestown's most respected citizens.

The lots laid out by Peter Little in 1765 were 66 feet front by 264 feet deep with an alley in the rear. They were sold subject to a ground rent of $1, payable May 1 of each year. Some of thes lots are still subject to ground rent to the H. J. S. Zeigler estate.

The purchaser was to build a dwelling on each lot within three years. The town was called Petersburg, as shown by the old deeds covering these lots.

The Monocacy road, which was opened in 1739, was called East and West King Streets, the Baltimore and Pittsburgh road was called North and South Queen Streets. The town was first called Petersburg and it is said that the founder expressed the desire that the town always be called by this name. It was later called "Kleina Stedtle," so the records reveal. Still later it took the Anglicized name of its founder, Peter Little's Town, but there was another town in Adams County by the same name, so to prevent confusion in mail matter, it was changed to Littlestown.

PETER LITTLE MARKER

Eight years after laying out the town, Peter Little died and was buried at Christ Church. A large dark gray tombstone marks his grave and bears an inscription in German. The stone has since been encased in glass.

German inscription: "Here ruhet in Gott welland Peter Klein. Ist gebohren dur 27 Aug. 1724. Ist gestorben den 7 den Ap. 1773. Seines alters 48 da, 7m, 11 l. Sena Frau is eina be borna Sheblern. Gott gebe thue und uss eina froelicha Auferstehung."

English translation: "Here rests the late Peter Little. He was born the 27th day of August, 1724, and died the 7th day of April, 1773. He was aged 48 yrs., 7 mos. and 11 days. Hhis wife's maiden name was Shebler. May the Lord grant to him and to us a glorious resurrection."

TURNPIKE COMPLETED

Littlestown lagged along quietly until the completion of the Gettysburg-Petersburg Turnpike in 1814. The Gettysburg and Petersburg Turnpike Company was charted on April 7, 1807, and it took about seven years to complete the pike. This formed a through line of turnpike from Pittsburgh to Baltimore, over which was carried in "Pitt Wagons," as they were called, traffic to and from the east and west. Several lines of stages, carrying mail and passengers from these points, passed through the town daily and the gaily-caparisoned horses and colored stage coaches, on their arrival and departure, created much excitement and interest among the people.

The act of incorporation named James McSherry, John Shorb, Jacob Winrott, James Gettys, Alexander Cobean and Henry Hoke, commissioners. Three hundred fifty shares at $100 each were taken. Samuel Sloan surveyed the line for $2 per mile in 1808 and James Gettys contracted to build the road for $4,585 per mile. Toll gates were rected in August, 1809, and the 10-mile extension from Gettysburg to the mountain was built in 1810.

Until the building of the railroad in 1857-1858 Peter Little's Town experienced a slow but steady growth. The population in 1800 was 250; in 1850 it was 394, and in 1870, following the railroad, it was 847.

RAILROAD OPENED

The Littlestown Branch Railroad was opened for traffic July 1, 1958. The cost was about $75,000 as shown in the report of the president, William McSherry. The road was extended to Frederick, Md., in 1871 and in December, 1874, the entire "Short Line" was leased to the Pennsylvania Railroad, the present operators.

TOWN TAKES LIFE

Littlestown took on new life. Additional lots were laid out by James Renshaw and George Myers and brought high prices. Two new warehouses were built along the railroad, a new hotel; all the stores were renovated and a few years later a new storeroom and dwelling house was erected by Ephraim Myers, which was at that time the finest and best constructed building in Adams County.

The Barker House, on the corner of West King and North Queen, at the square, was erected in 1848 by Joseph Barker, who for 20 years conducted its as a first class hostelry. June and July, 1863, brought his most exciting moments. On June 26 a band of Confederate soldiers entered Littlestown. Mr. Barker fed some of the southern officers in his hotel, for he did not want them to destroy private property, if his hospitality could prevent it. On the evening of June 29, General Kilpatrick's Division of Union Cavalry bivouacked for the night around the town, and both Kilpatrick and Custer lodged at the Barker House. Hundreds of wounded soldiers were brought from the battlefield at Gettysburg and placed on the cars in Littlestown. One of these was Gen. Dan Sickles, who lost his leg in the battle.

TOWN EXPANDS

Subsequent additions to the town were the opening of Lumber Street, Charles and M Streets, the Germany Township annex; the Ocker race track was converted into lots and sold, and the Crouse Park addition added both space and beauty. An early 1900 states "Littlestown is located in a rich fertile and healthy neighborhood; its citizens are remarkable for their energy, industry and hospitality, and show much taste in the neatness and cleanliness of the town, especially of their houses and homes. As a trade center, Littlestown is thoroughly established as a buying and shipping point for grain, produce and livestock, the facilities found are such as to render the highest market price to farmers of the surrounding territory."

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Crouse Park In Littlestown

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania