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Excerpts from the Robinson Twp. Historical Society History Book

“Ancestors’ Lifestyle in Moon, Fayette and then Robinson Townships, Part II”

Each issue will feature an excerpt from the Robinson Township history book. This excerpt continues with the retreat of Indians from Pennsylvania and the formation of Allegheny County.

In 1784, an important treaty at Fort Stanwix (now Rome, New York), was made with the Indians and the six Indian nations left this entire area to Pennsylvania. After that time no Indian activity took place around the fort except for small bands that pestered the outlying portions.

On September 24, 1788, Allegheny County was formed out of Westmoreland and Washington counties and the county seat became Pittsburgh. Moon Township was also established in 1788. The settlements became official and were recorded. During this time the French and English were fighting for possession of Fort Pitt or Fort Duquesne, depending upon whom was in control. Pittsburgh was just a trading post with many problems.

The Revolutionary War again created problems but it also put an end to the Ohio Land Company and Virginia’s control of Pennsylvania. In 1786, a legal decision was made stating that Pennsylvania controlled this area where we now live. In 1780 the Pennsylvania General Assembly put aside certain lands as “Donation Land” for soldiers of the Revolution who served in the Pennsylvania Army. “Depreciation Lands” were also given in place of delinquent or depreciated wages of soldiers. Some soldiers from all these wars in this area decided to stay here.

Southwest Pennsylvania became a colonial melting pot of various nationalities predominated by those speaking the English language. Most of the settlers were Scotch-Irish and German with some Welsh, Irish, French, and English. There were some Negroes, nearly all of who came with their masters from Virginia and Maryland. By an act of the Pennsylvania General Assembly in 1780, all Negroes and mulattos born after that became free when they turned 28 years of age. In 1788 any slaves brought into

Pennsylvania became free immediately. Southwestern Pennsylvania, from 1754 to 1788, found adventurers of all sorts drifting into the Pittsburgh area, including Indian traders, hunters, trappers, scouts, soldiers of all armies (English, French, and Federal), mixtures of half-breeds, poorly educated adventurers, and desperate men fleeing their former lives. Also, there were refined men of culture from the military with their families, aristocratic land developers, people hunting for a better way of life and people searching for the freedom for which their ancestors searched when they came to America in the first place. Most of these early pioneers were new immigrants to America. All were seeking a better life and fortune. Pittsburgh became the county seat and a trading center for necessary items such as iron, salt, sugar, and tools. Communications with the outside world was sparse because the mail was not brought regularly from the east until 1787.

Pittsburgh started as a rather wild and wooly trading post and became a borough in 1794. The area of Old Moon Township was becoming sparsely settled and out of necessity developed along agricultural lines. Coming from different parts of the old world and along the eastern seacoast, the pioneers brought different agricultural techniques that they followed here. They were farmers and skilled craftsmen well equipped to cope with the hazards and toil of pioneer life.

The Scotch-Irish were Scots who sojourned to northern Ireland in the early part of the 17th century to escape the persecution of Calvinistic Presbyterians in Scotland. Later in Ireland they wanted to get away from the payment of titles and taxes to support the Anglican Church. Between 1728 and 1776, 85,000 came to Pennsylvania. Beginning in 1768 in Southwestern Pennsylvania, the families became squatters from Virginia.

After the Revolutionary War, many more families came here. The Scotch-Irish preferred our lands which mostly represented their homeland. They chose the foothills rather than the valleys and shale soil rather than limestone as it contained more water. They were less interested in livestock than farming. Ever alert to new ideas, they contributed their hardiness, high morality religion, courage, and self-reliance. They were sturdy frontier people who build schoolhouses and churches.

The English came here from Virginia, Connecticut, and other New England colonies. They had a passion for land upon which they could establish permanent homes. They were good farmers and were quick to take advantage of new practices and methods of farming with new implements. They were good businessmen and as time passed, they became merchants and tradesmen.

The German settlers became the outstanding farmers. They came for religious, political, and economic reasons fleeing the persecutions in Europe. More than 200,000 came to Pennsylvania. Most Germans were a sturdy stock of farmers well equipped to meet the rigors of pioneer life. They preferred limestone soil in valleys near hardwood forests. They were wedded to their land that had acreage sufficient to feed and clothe their family and eventually provide a farm for each of their sons. They tilled the farm intensely with good conservation methods and built sturdy barns for their cattle. Some built better barns than houses at first. They made the wilderness a garden spot that really prospered with much labor.

Excerpted from the Robinson Township Bicentennial Book. Complete copies of the book can be purchased for \$25 by calling 412/264-2733.