

Excerpts from the Robinson Twp. Historical Society History Book

Each issue features a continuing excerpt from the Robinson Township history book. This excerpt presents the details just prior to Robinson becoming a township.

BEFORE ROBINSON BECAME A TOWNSHIP

The first permanent settlers arrived early in the 18th century and were Scotch-Irish farmers. Aside from the natural perils encountered in this frontier wilderness, they found hostile Indians from the Iroquois and Delaware Nations. Early settlers must have been endowed with great stamina. The forests of Western Pennsylvania were extremely dense and offered few natural village sites for native Americans. As a result, the settlers of this area encountered only Indian hunting or raiding parties.

The first permanent resident of Robinson Township was James Bell. James, born in 1751, was the eldest child of Robert Bell, Sr. Robert Sr. was from Tyrone, Ireland and his wife was from Edinburgh, Scotland. Robert Sr. served in the expedition of 1754 during the French and Indian War. Robert Bell, Jr. was one of many who accompanied General George Washington on the trip to Kanawha. He was a soldier in the Revolutionary War and a Quartermaster of Virginia and took part in 27 battles with the Indians in 1777. Members of the Bell family were in almost every war this country has engaged in. Joseph served in the Revolution and a grandson, James, was drafted in 1812. The Bells, McDowells, and the Justus, all descendants of the fifth generation, were in the Civil War. In the sixth generation of the Bells, Dr. Karl Simpson, Charles Nixon and R.B. Justus volunteered in the Spanish American War. Additionally, many members of the sixth and seventh generation served their country in World War I.

Robert Bell, Sr. had James, John, Robert Jr., Charles, William, David, Joseph, Samuel, Jane and Margaret. Margaret married Daniel Shawhan of Kentucky and came to Pittsburgh to live. Her descendants lived in Carnegie. Jane married a minister first, the second for money, and the third time to Benjamin Reno. John married Eleanor Blackmore of Maryland and had two girls and a boy. James married Mary Newkirk and had seven sons and two daughters. James was taught to remember the Sabbath, so he was one

of the first to help haul logs for a place of worship. The church cabin was called "The Tent" and was situated in Robinson where the present Montour Church now stands. It was six miles from Bell's home to the church and the men always carried their guns to protect themselves from Indian attacks. When asked why he always carried a gun James answered, "I might just meet an Indian whose time has come to die."

In 1778, James built a small stone house and later a log addition was added. A tenant took down the wooden part on December 5, 1912; but the stone portion was still standing. It was 1819 before James received title to his land on Rosslyn Heights. On May 4, 1917, the citizens of Rosslyn Heights erected a flag on that plot. James was one of the first overseers of the poor in Allegheny County. James' wife Mary died on March 5, 1826 and James died on December 5, 1836. They were both buried in their family graveyard and then moved by their descendants to the Chartiers Cemetary in Carnegie, PA.

The Bells were the first settlers in Chartiers Valley. Robert Sr. went to Patterson Fort to haul a load of wood. James and his brother were collecting wood when Indians attacked them. The brother ran and the Indians shot at him and when he fell behind a log, the Indians thought he was dead and took James. The brother ran home when they left and relayed what had happened. James was 10 years of age when he was taken by the Indians to Indiana and after several years was returned to his home in Virginia due to a treaty with the Indians.

In 1765, Robert Bell, Sr., thinking it was part of Virginia, staked out a claim in what is now Rosslyn. While on this trip, Robert rode his favorite horse, Drednot. Surefooted and rather spirited, the horse's saddle girth broke while jumping a small brook and Robert Sr. was thrown and hit his head on a tree trunk, thus killing him. The accident did not keep John and James from following their father's idea.

Excerpted from the Robinson Township Bicentennial Book. Complete copies of the book can be purchased for \$25 by calling Dick Story at 412/264-2733 or the Historical Society at 412/788-6795 on Tuesday or Thursday between 1 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.