

## Excerpts from the Robinson Twp. Historical Society History Book

### "Ancestors' Lifestyle in Moon, Fayette and then Robinson Townships, Part VI"

Each issue will feature an excerpt from the Robinson Township history book. This excerpt continues with a final segment on frontier life in the late 1700's and introduction to some of the first area homesteaders that established the communities.

Although the homes were comparatively isolated, the sternness of pioneer life was relieved by neighborliness. The latchstring was always out to a neighbor and the latchstring was secure inside when the home needed security. Farmers swapped work, exchanged equipment and visited often. If when visiting, it was too far or late to go home that night, they would bed down for the night. The women would spread the bedding from side to side on the floor. The host and hostess would lie in the center and the men and women would arrange themselves to the right and left respectively.

Social life for newcomers or newly married couples began with a home raising. A log cabin could be erected in a day provided the neighbors all helped. Barn raisings were also popular with a barn dance following. Other social gatherings were for butchering, apple butter making, spinning and quilting. Almost anything that could be done together in a social way made isolation more tolerable. Weddings, christenings and even funerals were major social events with customary celebration according to nationalities. Much of the fun of the pioneers was tied up with their work and daily needs. They never tired of target practice and matching skills with someone with rifles, bow and arrow or tomahawk. They enjoyed wrestling matches and weight lifting contests. There always was a fiddler for music. In winter there was bobsledding and coasting. Of course, holidays were joyously celebrated.

Social centers of the community were first of all the church. After going for long distances travelers stayed all day. There usually was a two-hour service then the noon meal and then another service in the afternoon. The country store was another social center as was the local inn or tavern. Often the blacksmith's shop was a gathering place. This of course was after the settlement grew.

When the trails became widened with use, the first wagonload was taken over the Allegheny Mountains in 1789. The hills were so steep in places that huge trees were tied to the back to drag as a brake. Up until

1800, there were no bridges and it was necessary to ford the streams. After the wagon trains began more of the comforts of the east were available. Farmers were able to barter for salt, iron, spices and glass. Salt was by far the most important. In 1790, 20 bushels of wheat were required to purchase a bushel of salt. Furs, ginseng and whiskey were the bartering media. Some pack trains numbered 10-25 horses. The famous Conestoga wagons came into active operation in 1789. The Conestoga wagon was the commercial transportation of the day. This was a Pennsylvania-German innovation covered with the thickness of heavy woven cloth that kept out rain. Taverns and inns were located a day's journey apart for the drovers. After this date, people came in steady streams.

Manufacturing began in Pittsburgh in 1789 and continued to expand. In 1796 there were 1,395 people and 102 houses. By 1800 there were 1,565 people but by 1840 there were 38,931. The scattered population in the outlying districts also expanded and small villages began to form to provide supplies for the people's needs.

With all this information as a background, let us consider our local area as to what took place here. The present town of Coraopolis was called Middletown. It was built over 200 years ago as a fort. Near the end of the French and Indian War, the British defeated the French and built Fort Pitt which had burned down. The Indians were driven west but bands of Indians still raided along the Ohio River. Lieutenant Robert Vance, a professional soldier from Virginia attached to Fort Pitt as an Indian fighter, built a fort, blockhouse and stockade on land he bought at the mouth of Montour Creek in 1759. Groveton is on the east side and Coraopolis is on the west side of Montour Creek today. In 1760, Alexander Middletown built the Red Lion Inn on the high band at the foot of what now is Main Street. This was a strategic spot, a day's journey from the point for travelers. The inn benefited from the protection of Vance's Fort.

Lumbermen cut prime timber from the

dense forest of mighty trees and made rafts to float to markets as far as New Orleans. River travel was dangerous after dark so travelers stopped at the Red Lion Inn. George Washington spent the night of October 20, 1770 at the inn. Businesses sprung up around the inn, with a blacksmith, tanner, shoemaker, general store and several river ferries. The town of Middletown grew. Settlers from the surrounding area came to the fort for protection when needed.

In Charles Rouser's *Early History and Families of Moon Township*, written in 1948-49, he tells accounts of stories passed on from one generation to another. An Indian was killed at Gordon's Pond and buried by the owner of the property. William Gordon came to Moon Township in 1769 and lived on a portion of the Meek property. He was a cabinetmaker and his specialty was the spinning wheel. He built himself a small saw mill and building for his shop with water power from a dam to operate his lathe.

Amos Roney cleared all his land for a home. He then built a cabin before he brought his family west in 1785. He had worked hard all summer to get the logs ready for the "raisin" of his cabin. The early fall found him without his cabin. He cut some wild hay and made a hay stack into which he dug a hole where he could sleep at night rather than on a blanket outside. One night he carried a dressed pig from his neighbors and shoved it ahead of him into the hole. He then rolled up in his blanket, crawled into the hole and went to sleep. He did not waken until morning. When fully awake, he looked for his ham and bacon for breakfast, but it was gone. Outside, he found evidence in the newly fallen snow of bear track in and out of the hole in the haystack. He certainly was a sound sleeper not to have been bothered by the thief!

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.