

Feb. 12, 2014

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S

MUSEUM

. . . while dusting



Paul Harvey on the radio used to refer to “the rest of the story” but we’re going to say “here is the story.” Deb Wilson’s fictional story is based on facts and the people we’ve introduced you to in the previous two articles. Everyone mentioned played a pivotal role in the not only the creation of the town of Laporte but also the history of Sullivan County itself. This story and the other background material gathered by Deb can be found in the Keeler genealogy at the museum for further research. And now, without further ado – Deb’s story.

“*The Sugar Maples of Muncy Street* Across the patchwork of farm fields and forest an April sunrise broke over North Mountain. Just visible through the dawn mist that spring morning in 1852, was a farm wagon hitched to a pair of horses. A man and boy were seated on its plank seat

and as they left the farmstead the two turned and waved to a woman standing in the doorway of a house. Sarah Keeler nodded and turned back into the house to begin her long day. John Keeler and his 12 year old son TJ were heading down the mountain to Laporte to meet with a man who had work for them. The road down from Nordmont was little more than a trail with deep ruts. Branches and overgrowth from the woods scraped the wagon as the horses plodded along.

“John Keeler could not really spare a day away from his farm and he considered leaving the boy behind to finish haying and start building the stone wall at the north ridge of their land. But Mr. Meylert had asked John to bring the boy along, he said it was a two man job and young TJ would be needed.

“The sun grew warmer and the trail widened as John Keeler and his boy drove into the center of Sullivan County. Men had been working here for some time chopping down giant hemlocks to clear space in what had only recently been dense forest. Around the outskirts of the settlement the land was dotted with hemlock stumps and rocks. A town taking shape, at least in the mind of a man named Michael Meylert. Meylert had visions for this clearing in the woods where a hotel, blacksmith shop, store and a scattering of houses already stood. Surely this hamlet named Laporte would be the hub of much commerce and affairs befitting a county seat. Michael Meylert envisioned more stores, hotels, houses, churches, a school and maybe a tannery someday.

“Meylert was standing on the corner of Cranberry Alley and the main street, talking to William Mason about what to pay the workmen who were laying the plank sidewalks in front of the hotel. Five cents an hour was being debated as a possibility. Michael Meylert was a striking man. Wide of girth with a full head of black hair and a black beard, he stood out among the townsmen. He was wearing a vested suit and tie and young TJ marveled that he was wearing his church cloths on a Saturday. His heavy work boots and calloused hands however, bore evidence of hard labor.

“Spying Keeler and the boy, Meylert motioned them across the street and introduced them to Mr. Mason. Meylert told Mason that these were his “tree planters” and that eventually Maple trees would shade the park and line all the main streets of town. Someday they would be large enough to be tapped and sweet maple syrup would be plentiful in Laporte.”

To be continued.

(Photo: The family of Thomas Jackson Keeler with his wife Mary Ellen (Meade) and their children Winifred, Herbert and Olive. Circa 1894-95)