



Feb. 5, 2014

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM ... while dusting

Continuing with the players for a story written by Deb Wilson for the Keeler family genealogy:

Michael Meylert (1823-1883) from Susquehanna County, he became a prominent and highly esteemed citizen of Sullivan County and a substantial business man of Laporte, of which he was the founder. To settle the question of the location of where to place the county seat for the newly formed Sullivan, annexed from Lycoming County in 1847 – it took Michael's offer of land and the money to build the first courthouse in what was not yet really the "town" of Laporte to settle that question. Once this offer was accepted, he had a plan for the layout of Laporte having streets and alleys named, lots numbered and the park. On paper this appeared to be the instigation of a thriving town. And because he was a land speculator, this was philanthropy coupled with good

business. He erected the first frame house in Laporte proper, known as the Mountain House and later built the Laporte Hotel, a handsome and even considered grand for its time, three story high structure which stood until destroyed by fire in 1897. He also built a sawmill and tannery. He established a newspaper, The Sullivan Democrat, of which he was the proprietor and editor for thirty years. In 1846, Michael married Ann Finch. Between the years of 1853 and 1871, Michael's grand mansion located on a high spot above the town, was under construction. Upon completion the white pillared house had some 25 rooms, 61 windows and 12 exterior doors, with a cupola atop the roof. Many workmen toiled on the mansion over the years but Thomas Jackson (TJ) Keeler was in fact one of the three main carpenters. The home, still standing today, is light yellow with white trim. Michael had been a very heavy man all of his life and according to accounts tipped the scales at well over three hundred pounds by the end of his life. He struggled with related health problems that this excess weight brought with it and was known to be ill the last year of his life. Death did not take him by surprise. He died Jan. 17 of 1863 and his funeral was held in his mansion in Laporte. A fierce winter storm prevented some people from attending but large numbers in and around Laporte were able to attend this sad event. He was buried in Mountain Ash Cemetery.

William Francher (1811-1889) originated in Susquehanna County where his family had first settled in the Montrose area in 1807. He was brought to Sullivan County by Michael Meylert to build the homes needed for the newly established county seat town of Laporte. Lot #1 was his property purchased to build what may have been the first home in this fledgling town. He and his family, wife Susan and children Margaret, Emma, Olive and Martha remained in Laporte until returning to Susquehanna County in 1863 where William died in 1889. Upon his leaving, William sold Lot #1 to Benjamin L. Cheney for \$500. Later the third family to own and live in the home were the Baldwins. This property is now part of the Sullivan County Historical Society's museum complex depicting furnishings from 1850 to 1880's for visitors. The property also contains the yard and gardens with The Barn and The Shed for displaying of artifacts.

William Mason (1818-1892) was born in Towanda, Bradford County. He was educated as a civil engineer and surveyor. William settled in Laporte in 1848 and erected a frame home, the third built in Laporte. He did much of the surveying in Sullivan County and adjoining ones as well. Along with Michael Meylert, William was instrumental in laying out the town of Laporte. He served as Associate Judge of Sullivan County, was the first Justice of the Peace, was County Treasurer and held the office of Postmaster. He died in Laporte in January 1892 and was buried in Mountain Ash Cemetery.

(Photo: Thomas Jackson Keeler (TJ) at a young age with his carpenter's saw and triangle)