



The mill at Campbellville

Jan. 6, 2021

TOURING SULLIVN COUNTY'S MUSEUM . . .
while dusting

Continuing on with the subject of Campbellville history. We'd ended the last article with John Campbell's purchase of 17 1/2 acres in Forks Twp. for \$37.50 in 1848 to create a grist mill. At that time the population of the township was 309, with 64 dwellings in 32 square miles. And word of John Campbell's new venture had spread quite fast so that in the spring of 1849 his new neighbors far and wide were anxious

for the grist mill to be in operation. John's plan was for sons Hiram and James to be of great assistance to both learn and operate the new mill they'd be creating. The first task was to build a mill pond so as to determine the placement and size of all the buildings needed. Roughly 20 of their neighbors came to help with the project, meals and comradery.

From Burke Campbell's History of Campbellville comes this: "Burke road came down the steep hill from the Elkland township line between Lick creek and Level branch, crossed Level branch and connected with Kelly Hill road and Lick Creek road. Thus, when the millpond filled up to its required volume, no one would be able to cross the creek at all." That dilemma meant that John needed to build a covered bridge. The north side (the one still visible today) was built first with, again, the help of neighbors. Covered bridges were the norm, particularly for grist mills, so that during inclement weather or overnight stays, wagons could lodge under their cover while awaiting their turn at the grist mill. They were built at the cost and help of the landowners (no Penn Dot back then). The bridge took three weeks to build. This is one of the few covered bridges not built by Sadler Rogers but rather by the Campbells and their neighbors. It was built on the "Queen post" method but without a center V post as would have been needed in longer expansions. The covered bridge had a passage way of 10 feet high and about 5 feet wide for an almost 50 foot span, taking a posted 3 ton limit.

As fall approached, John's mind was on the urgency to complete the grist mill to the benefit of his now friends and neighbors who were more than anxious to take advantage of its workings. It was during this soon to be completion that John announced that the mill was to be Hiram's and for that the son was elated. Son James was offered by George Hunsinger to work in his sawmill just down the road. The mill began operation on Sept. 6th of 1849. James Kelly coming down from Kelly Hill Road was the first customer with 35 sacks of wheat to be ground, each containing about 3 bushels. John had told Mr. Kelly that the first ten bushels would be ground at no cost in thanks for Kelly's help. They could grind 15 bushels of wheat in approximately one hour.

In 1854 John Campbell sold his New Albany mill with sixty acres to his son, John S. for \$478. Meanwhile, John, the father, was considering building a store at the Campbellville location. Once built the locality was now being referred to as "Campbell Mill" or "Campbell's Store". Friend, Rev, Richard Bedford, made the suggestion and offered to start the process for the store to also house a post office. The closest post offices at

the time were Millview and Forksville. On Jan. 8th, 1851 John was named postmaster for the location called Campbellsville (the s was eventually dropped). The cost of mail at that time was paid by the receiver, not the sender. So, there were times when a visitors to the store were permitted to put this cost on their "account".

Talk had been in continuum for the need of a school in the immediate area of Campbellville for the local growing population. The initial school was built in 1853 above the mill towards Estella but in 1884 a second school was built at the rise that based Kelly Hill Road on the right (a cabin is on that ground today). It was locally thought that the first schoolhouse was purposely burned down. The reason was the difficulty for children to climb the steep embankment (up or down) and parishioners to Sunday services conducted by Rev. Richard Bedford. That second school was called the Pleasant Valley School.

On March 28, 1856 Hiram Campbell and Hannah Warren were married by Rev. Bedford at the school/church house at Campbellville. A year later Hiram was named postmaster in his father's stead. Nov. 20, 1857 Hiram and Hannah welcomed a son, Francis M. Campbell. Life in this small hamlet was filled with prosperity and happiness. John and Mary, now in their mid-sixties, could relax in the knowledge that they'd contributed to the well-being of their own and others families in this growing wilderness of Sullivan County. Then on Jan. 28, 1862 tragedy struck as Hiram was felling a tree to burn the wood for heat. While carrying the butt of the tree on his shoulders, he slipped on the ice of the mill pond, fell and broke his neck for an instant death. A brother, Caleb, took over the mill at the request of father John. And John took back the job of postmaster of Campbellville. Then in Dec. of 1862 Hiram's son, Francis, died from an epidemic that scorched this and many other areas.

This time period is also laced with the happening of the Civil War and many area men had gone to support the effort, primarily for the Union. At the age of 69 John, and his wife Mary, received word that both James and Joseph had been wounded in different battles. And, that oldest son William had been taken prisoner to Andersonville and died there of starvation. John, the father, now asked son James if he'd be interested in acquiring a grist mill and store in the larger town of Shunk in Fox Township. James was definitely interested in somewhere larger than the small community of Campbellville and thus John's holdings in the town were sold to Jacob L. Snyder for \$2,500 on May 13th of 1865.

Thus ended the involvement of the Campbells in the hamlet they'd created. In the year 1865 John did purchase the grist mill, store and adjoining property in Shunk and then transferred his ownership to son James. John died April 18, 1881, sixteen years after this transaction.

Over the years the grist mill, store and lands changed hands many times as can be witnessed by the change in postmaster appointments. The last owner/operator of the gristmill was Powell and John Norton. After a terrific storm and flooding in Nov. 1901 broke the mill building and parts apart, they decided not to rebuild. The store continued until 1920 when the post office closed and mail was re-rerouted to Eldredsville. This action was a death knell for the store and eight years later, 1928, with the death of Powell Norton, his wife Mary and son Wallace sold the property to Otis Hatch for \$1,200. (The other half had been acquired by Wallace following the death of John Norton in 1911.)

In 1935 many country roads were being widened and improve in various manners. Wallace Norton continued to operate the store until 1937. In 1939 Wallace and son David tore down the store. (Our records show the because of a new culvert installed where the store used to be, that Otis Hatch dismantled the covered bridge in about 1955 and salvaged the wood.) In 1941, Carl Driscoll purchased the property as he'd grown up very near and gone to school in Campbellville. Thus ended the saga of a little known settlement that sprung up and eventually died down within a Devil's Elbow on a back road in Sullivan County.

When the historic storm of 2017 hit Sullivan County and surrounding areas it made a dent in the way many from the northwestern side of the county travel to Dushore and/or Route 220 North. And all this was made even more difficult with the influx of gas and oil trucks needing to maneuver these, often dirt, roads to reach

wells or their terminals. So we thank those who planned and worked to complete the new culvert and road beds this fall that comprise the confluence at the bottom of Devil's Elbow. But, if you're ever traveling this road – take time to stop your car. Get out and stand at the bottom facing up Burke Hill Road (Kelly Hill Road will be on your right), look to your right across the stream bed. You'll be looking at the abutment of that first laid up the north portion of the covered bridge at Campbellville. We have received many a call or inquiry as to the damage caused by the storm to the abutment but needed to assure folks that the small stones pile at its base have always been there . . . and, that there really aren't much more now. The important thing is that the abutment has, shall we say, 'stood the test of time' and validated the ingenuity of John Campbell and his friends and neighbors.

We would also like to express the deepest thanks to Burke Campbell for his book entitled History of Campbellville, Sullivan County, Pennsylvania published in 2003. It is no longer in print but if you're lucky enough to have or fine one; it is a treasure of this and far more information.

For this and more you can contact us at 570-946-5020 or email museum@scpahistory.com or visit our web site at www.scpahistory.com

