

This Place Matters

I Remember Pappy
by Odessa Hixon Biesecker

In 1930, I moved to Locust Grove, Bainbridge, PA with my family when my father became engaged in farming on the J. E. Baker Co. farm. This was 80 years ago and things have changed.

The other inhabitants of the small village, at that time, included the B. F. Hoffmans in the Haldeman Mansion on the hill, Mr. and Mrs. Gueisteweite, occupying a small tenant house on the property, “Grammy” Schrum in the house across the road, and Mr. and Mrs. Harry Poole in the house across the creek.

Since I was too young to be completely involved in the farm work like my brother and sister, and I had no other children to play with, I occupied much of my time tagging after Pappy Gueisteweite, the Hoffman’s gardener. Many hours were spent – helping to pick up brickle sticks, as he called them, small twigs and branches that fell from the trees and had to be picked up before the mowing could be accomplished. There were no self-propelled, power riding mowers back then, just “Pappy Power,” and the lawns were always beautifully manicured.

As we picked, raked and trimmed, he never failed to keep me spellbound with his many tales of the “good old days.” As we worked around the ice house, he would tell me how, in winter, they would cut the ice in huge blocks from the creek or river and sled it to the ice house where it was packed in sawdust and stored for next summer’s use.

A short distance from the terraced lawns laid the old canal bed, now grown with a dense under brush and trees. He told me how the boats were drawn with mules, how the locks worked, and how the supplies were brought in and taken out of the canal boat. On the one boundary along the creek on the opposite bank stood the large tobacco warehouse; its foundation was once a distillery.

And I am sure there are still residents in the area who remember the beautiful old stone mill which stood here on Conoy’s banks. I shall never forget the last flower show that as held there before the mill as bulldozed into oblivion, or the many hours I spent playing under the cool spray of the mill dam.

Bainbridge, according to “Pappy” in his day as he put it, must have been quite an industrial village, almost self sustaining. The dentist made watches to supplement his income. The postmistress was a seamstress and milliner. There was a currier and tanner who tanned the leather to make saddles, harnesses, and shoes. The shoemaker, who not only mended the shoes, made shoes while you

waited if you had time, that is. “Pappy” demonstrated, for me, how the shoemaker would pour his mouth full of brads or tacks and used his tongue to push them out as needed.

There were a wheelwright and plough maker, a blacksmith and tinsmith, a coal yard, storekeepers and dry goods merchants. A copper shop made “much needed” barrels because everything was stored and shipped in them, including flour, sugar, molasses, salt and fish. There was a tailor, as a sign on Marguerite Gingrich’s home will testify, after having been stripped of its many coats of paint that had been hiding there through the years.

We can’t forget the doctor who kept the jar of medicinal leeches in his office. He made his calls with a horse and buggy.

There were two hotels and an express station Pappy saw many businesses flourish and die in the wake of progress. He watched the canal reluctantly give way to the railroad. Also the horse-drawn vehicles took to the side of the road for the “gasoline buggies”

How much as a fact or how much was fabricated for the amusement of a child I will never know. But I shall always look back upon those fleeting years as a cherished part of my childhood.

I never tired of hearing those stories over and over again. Sometimes after my evening chores were finished, dusk would find me skipping down the road to Gueistweites’ house. By the feeble lamp, we would play checkers or dominoes. And always more stories!

“Pappy” and his wife spoke Pennsylvania Dutch. I couldn’t understand a word they were saying, but somehow by the tone of her voice and the twinkle in his eye, I got the impression sometimes I was being joshed.

An example of one of these stories: “The Story of the Milkman”

The milkman arrived in his horse-drawn wagon with large cans of milk, from which he filled the pitchers and pails of the housewives along the way. Nearing the end of his route and thinking that the dwindling supply wouldn’t last, he would stop at the creek to fill and water the milk down a little. That explained why the kids on the beginning of the route were fat, and those on the end, skinny.

The story he enjoyed telling the most, especially to my elders, was the one I liked least.

It was about the barefoot kid he caught in his garden helping herself to the gooseberries and currants. So engrossed in this childish prank, she did not see she was being observed from the other side of the hedge until she was snarled by the ankle in the crook of his outstretched cane. In her surprised haste, she went tumbling end over end. Yes, you guessed it, the culprit was me.

Then in 1933, Pappy put down his shovel and hoe and went to his reward. He had given me a pair of little crystal mugs, trimmed in gold, that I keep in my hutch.

But his best gift to me has no monetary value. It can neither be bought nor sold. It can only be shared as he shared it with me.

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