



In the spring 2020 edition of **UPPER ST. CLAIR TODAY**, we continue to present portions of *Upper St. Clair As It Was*, a 40-page documentary by Margaret Gilfillan.

With specific permission granted from the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair for the reprint of the fifth edition, May 2013, we share our Township's past as told through the pages of this book. In this issue, we share pages 5–19 of the documentary, and will continue with the remaining pages in the magazine's summer and fall 2020 editions.

Want a copy of the book, which helps financially support the Historical Society? Want to volunteer at Gilfillan Farm or with the Historical Society at events or other happenings? There's lots of ways to become involved!

As we enter this new decade and begin a new era, always use the past to keenly shape your future.

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**Upper St. Clair As It Was (continued)**

A DOCUMENTARY  
By MARGARET B. GILFILLAN

Presented by  
The Historical Society of Upper St. Clair

Probably all of these had been living on their land for ten to twenty years before receiving their patents or grants due to the Pennsylvania-Virginia boundary dispute. Each had built a cabin, always near a spring, a most vital asset and "made a location" by marking trees. So, having shown that he intended permanent settlement, he made application for a Warrant either through the Surveyor General's Office in Harrisburg or in Virginia, depending on which he considered had legal rights to the territory, or else waited until the dispute should be settled and he could be sure of a grant that would stand. Meanwhile, he proceeded with the tremendous task of clearing the land which was heavily timbered. We can only regret that they and their descendants were so industrious that few of the original trees are left.

During the years of the Revolution the boundary question was held in abeyance<sup>5</sup> but when peace came in 1784 warrants were taken out, usually at the rate of ten pounds per hundred acres with interest dating back to the time the location was made. This authorized the Surveyor General to make survey of the land and in the course of the next few years, the Patent was received from the Supreme Executive Council of the Commonwealth stating that – "in consideration of the monies paid into the Receiver General Officer at the granting of the Warrant and the sum of Seventeen pounds, nine shillings lawful money granted a certain tract of land called ---- situate in Peters Township, Washington County --- here described --- to the use of -----, his heirs and Assigns forever, clear of all Restrictions and Reservations as to mines, royalties, Quit Rents or otherwise, excepting and reserving only the fifth part of the Gold and Silver for the use of the Commonwealth."

<sup>5</sup> State of waiting for determination of true owner



These settlers came from England and Scotland, some of the latter, having lived for a generation of two in North Ireland, were known as Scotch-Irish. They had a religious heritage and their natural inclination was to gather for worship on the Sabbath day. When that great pioneer missionary of the West, the Reverend John McMillan, came into this area we can imagine how eagerly they met to hear him when he notes in his diary on Tuesday, November 5, 1776 he preached at Peters Creek and baptized five children. In 1780 the people built a log church and in 1783 were able to secure the Reverend John Clark as a settled pastor, a rare privilege on this frontier. (There was no church of any faith built at Fort Pitt before 1786.) The little log cabin was called Bethel and though not within our boundaries since 1845 its influence for good in our lives from the earliest days cannot be measured.

The people shared in all the dangers, privations and hardships common to pioneer life. While not on any regular Indian trail, arrowheads, stone hatchets and even an occasional grave have been found; especially in the area near Chartiers Creek, so we know that they hunted through here. Couch's Fort, near Bethel Church, was built for protection in case of attack; it was really a small

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Gilfillan land patent, Part of the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair Archives Collection

stockade but there is no record or legend of its being needed. However, until the Indians were finally driven out of Western Pennsylvania in 1794 at the battle of Fallen Timbers, attacks were made and people killed or captured but a few miles distant.

Bears, wolves and panthers, or painters as they were called, hence Painters Run, were common. There were no large settlements west of the mountains or roads other than trails. Everything was carried on pack horses and most of the things we consider necessities were unknown or rare luxuries to our ancestors. Salt, for instance, had to be brought over the mountains or up from Virginia; Chambersburg and Winchester were salt depots and the trip took at least twenty days. It was carried in baskets hung over the horses' backs and was paid for with skins and ginseng<sup>7</sup>. At first the lack of a grist mill was a real hardship.

It was customary for land to be left to the sons of a family, daughters receiving a supply of household goods on marriage which, because of the difficulty in obtaining the simplest furnishings, were indeed valuable with perhaps a horse, cow and a few sheep. This is one reason why some of the land in the township remained, until the day of the subdivisions, in the same family name as the original patentee; members of the Boyce, Gilfillan, Fife, Morrow, Morton and Philips families<sup>8</sup> still owning part of the tracts received from the Commonwealth so long ago.

There is no reason to suppose these people were in any way different from their contemporaries across

<sup>7</sup> Similar to the well know Asian root, ginseng has been harvested in Western Pennsylvania for generations  
<sup>8</sup> The Gilfillan property has been maintained as a historic site. The others properties are no longer with the original families.

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the country. Manners and customs which may now seem quaint or peculiar were typical in their day and generation. Of necessity they were independent and self-reliant. There is a family tradition that Mrs. Alexander Gilfillan and her sister, Mrs. William Fife, used to ride horseback over the trails to visit their father who lived at the Forks, land between the Monongahela and the Youghiogheny Rivers near Elizabeth, often with child on behind and a baby in her arms, fording the river even though on one occasion they found it full of floating ice.

What used to be called the “common school” frequently had the advantage of very good teaching and institutions of higher learning were near from very early time. Jefferson College was founded in Canonsburg in 1802, Washington College in 1806, the Washington Female Seminary in 1836 and the forerunner of Pitt, the Western University of Pennsylvania, in 1819. In each generation there were ambitious young people who after some additional schooling, perhaps at nearby Bethel Academy, went on to college and entered one of the professions.

That they did not live together in an unnatural state of harmony is shown in the docket<sup>9</sup> of Alexander Gilfillan who was a Justice of the Peace. The earliest surviving record begins in March, 1799. Most of the entries are too brief and business-like to be interesting concerning the collection of small debts, one hundred dollars being the legal limit set on the amount on which a squire could rule. The money is entered in dollars and cents but bits of scrap paper found between the pages of the earliest record show that pounds and shillings were still used. However, a few interesting sidelights appear

<sup>9</sup> Part of the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair Archives Collection

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which help us see our early neighbors. In December, 1810 Margaret Wallace “exhibits an account of sixteen dollars, twenty-three and one-half cents for a Great Riding Coat which she says does not fit her.” On April 29, 1811 in the entry under the Commonwealth vs.



<sup>10</sup> Docket of Alexander Gilfillan, Justice of the Peace, Part of the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair Archives Collection

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Greenberry Keens, the defendant is accused on the oath of William Kerns of “swearing two profane oaths by the name of God” and judgment given that “he do pay sixty-seven cents for each oath, one-half to the Overseers of the Poor of St. Clair Township, the other half to the prosecutor.” That this entry is shortly followed by another for assault and battery involving the same men is not strange; similar combinations appear elsewhere in the records. A defendant agrees in 1812 to make seven hundred rails or pay two dollars and eighty cents<sup>11</sup> in three weeks and judgment is given for the plaintiff for “six dollars for three months keeping of a horse creature.” In 1815 a man recovers three dollars for a pair of plated spurs and Dr. John Waring in an “amicable suit” collects five dollars for delivering a man’s wife. Also, in that year the Squire “on the Lord’s day as I was going to public worship of God, saw and examined a certain John Melaney, who said he lived in Washington, Pennsylvania, driving his wagon and team and upon close examination found he was under no necessity, so I do adjudge him to pay four dollars of a fine, agreeable to an act of the general Assembly in such case.” This encounter took place on our Washington Road.

The first homes were, of course, built of logs and they were used as small homes and barns for many years. Typical are the house opposite the Municipal Building on McLaughlin Run Road and one just off the same road on Morrow Road<sup>12</sup>. But when a saw-mill was built people were able to have warmer, more easily constructed frame houses. The oldest house in the township for which a date can be given without any guesswork is the large stone house on Seegar Road, built

<sup>11</sup> Considered comparable to an unskilled wage, 2013 value is approximately \$518.00 Source: [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com)

<sup>12</sup> This house was removed in the 1980’s

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by Joseph Philips in 1806. It stands today unaltered in outward appearance since the day the date was cut in a stone in the gable.

The clay here makes good brick and there are five homes built which were made and fired at the site of the house. Since there was no mill-work done then and all the windows, doors, etc., were made by the carpenter, these houses were around two years in building. The oldest (using in each case the name of the original owner) is probably the Johnston house on Southvue Drive built in 1839. The Borland house on Cook School Road, the Fife and Caldwell houses on Old Washington Road were no doubt built during the next ten years; the Gilfillan house, which has solid brick walls and partitions, ten rooms at that time, eight with fireplaces, and a porch on each side cost about six thousand dollars!

The original part of the stone house on McMillan Road<sup>13</sup>, built by one of the Conners, goes back to the very early part of the last century and the Espy house on Mohawk Road is the oldest frame house, dating perhaps to 1840.

Most of the earlier settlers are buried in Bethel Cemetery, as are many of their descendants, but one chose to lie in an unmarked grave near a favorite horse and another, Samuel Conner, set aside a small hilltop plot on his farm for himself and anyone too poor to buy a lot in a cemetery. Years later a new owner of the farm had him removed to Bethel but the relatives brought him back. However, due to more recent developers and the now more distantly related family connection, he again lies in Bethel Cemetery.

<sup>13</sup> This house was removed in the 1980’s



IN NATIONAL AFFAIRS

The Revolution

At the outbreak of the Revolution in the East the Indians were instigated by the British to harass the Western frontier settlements to divert their attention from the war. To protect their homes volunteer militia companies were formed and the men of this section with William Fife as Captain organized a company of ninety-six men who furnished their own horses and equipment. They are listed in the Pennsylvania Archives, 6<sup>th</sup> Series, Volume 2.<sup>14</sup>

These men took part in Colonel William Crawford's disastrous expedition against the Indians on the Sandusky Plains and also patrolled the Western Border between Fort Pitt and Wheeling. It was customary for enlistments to be for a period of months, the men returning home to plant or harvest the crops on which the lives of their families depended, then reenlisting.

The Whiskey Insurrection

All the action of the Whiskey Insurrection took place within the boundaries of the original St. Clair Township and has been fully covered in many histories. The only part in the present township was when the men, some five hundred in number coming from many miles around, after organizing at Couch's Fort on July 15, 1794, marched along the ridge now Fort Couch Road on their way toward General Nevill[e]'s home at Bower Hill.

<sup>14</sup> Available through the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

The Civil War

In response to President Lincoln's call for volunteers, Thomas Espy, who lived near Clifton, organized and became captain of the St. Clair Guards which was mustered into service as Company H, 62<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers on July 25, 1861. Eighty-three men from this area are listed by name in the "History of Bethel Church" and served through the war with a most honorable record. Captain Espy was killed at Gaines Mill and twelve others were either killed in action or died in hospital before the end of the war.

The Militia

There was an organized militia here probably during most of the period between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. This was true in most communities throughout the state. A minute book of the company known as the "President's Volunteers" for the year 1841 to 1844 is still in existence.<sup>15</sup> There were ninety-six men enrolled though the average attendance was forty. Each man furnished his own uniform, if any, and they met on the "days required by law and also on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February and the 10<sup>th</sup> of September and such other days as were agreed upon by the majority of the members." This usually came to five or six days in the year and included the Fourth of July which became a time for picnics, everyone wanting to see the marching and hear the Fife and Drum Corps.

<sup>15</sup> Part of the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair Archives Collection



<sup>16</sup> Roll of the President's Volunteers, Part of the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair Archives Collection

WASHINGTON ROAD

Washington Road, originally called the Washington Pittsburg<sup>17</sup> Stage Road, has always been our principal thoroughfare. Until the parallel road through the present Carnegie and Bridgeville section was stoned and made a toll road, which was completed in 1835, it carried all travel south from Pittsburgh. Its course has changed many times. At first roughly a quarter of a mile north of the present route there is a petition recorded in the road docket in the Clerk of Courts Offices in 1821 stating that the road might in the signer's "humble opinion be altered without much expense so as to shun most of the bad hills altogether."

It has always been a busy road and for many years there was an inn, known as the Western Inn, in the village where the stage horses were changed. Beside the stage on the road there were many peddlers' wagons going out from Pittsburgh for produce and returning loaded with calves, chickens, ducks, eggs and butter. Then there were the loads of hay and grain hauled either by the farmers or by dealers who both bought and sold. For many years hay and straw were the principal money crops of all farmers for miles around Pittsburgh as not only the public and private stables but the mills, especially the glass factories, used straw and any business that delivered wares kept horses. It took four or, if the roads were bad, six horses and a long day in time to take a load from here to town and farmers from further out often stopped at the Inn overnight.

<sup>17</sup> Pittsburgh was spelled without an 'h' from 1890-1911 as a result of a government initiative under President Benjamin Harrison to drop the final 'h' from the name of all cities and town ending in 'burgh'. The citizens of Pittsburgh campaigned to keep their 'h' and won the battle in 1911.

Also, there were drovers who took sheep and cattle to the Pittsburgh market on foot. It was customary for all fields and, we must suppose, all front yards to be fenced or it would have been impossible to drive livestock over a public road. The regular overnight stopping place was on a farm now a part of Sunset Hills, Mt. Lebanon, where for many years certain fields were still known as the Sheep Field, the Cattle Field, etc.

With the building of the Old Railroad the peddler's wagons gradually disappeared but as long as horses were in general use huge, stately loads of hay went rustling up the road, the horses' brass trimmed harnesses shining. In time these were succeeded by the market wagon as many farmers turned to vegetables as a money crop. From early summer until frost heavy loads of garden produce were taken to the Farmers Market on Monongahela Wharf on several evenings each week.

Washington Road, as every road in the township, was for most of its first century of use a mud road, a term conveying little to one who is without personal knowledge of its meaning. In wet weather the road was either bad or impassable, depending on the condition of the drains and occasional "thank-you-mams;" in summer it was often inches deep in dust, which made a light lap robe as necessary as the wool or perhaps wolf or buffalo-skin one was in the winter. Many a beautiful quilt and hand woven coverlet came to an untimely end in buggy or sleigh. Riding horseback was a common practice for both men and women and walking long distances certainly not unusual.

Fortunately in 1897-98 one of the first strips of macadam<sup>18</sup> or hard surface road in the county was built

<sup>18</sup> A road surface of compressed small broken stones and a binder compound

the first Odd Fellows Hall. The tinsmith made not only gutters and spouts but may kitchen utensils and cans for preserving food. Wagons made here were well known for their strength and durability.

Upper St. Clair was perhaps rather a long name and unfortunately the name "Sodom" began to be commonly, though unofficially, used for the village as early as 1850. In an effort to rectify this the name of Clifton was selected when the frame school-house was built on Washington Road in 1900. By then the general store, blacksmith and wagonmaker shops were the only ones active.

#### THE MAIL

There is no record of the first mail delivery in the township but Pittsburgh was, of course, the nearest post office for many years, with letters and papers being held until someone happened by and picked up the mail for his neighborhood. We have letters addressed simply "Allegheny County."



<sup>21</sup> Part of the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair Archives Collection

between Mt. Lebanon and Clifton. However, residents who about 1907 bought their first automobiles put them up for the winter. It was not until red-dog<sup>19</sup> from the burnt out slag piles of the mines proved not only easily available but lasting enough to be practical that all roads were made passable for cars the year round.

#### UPPER ST. CLAIR – SODOM – CLIFTON

The village of Upper St. Clair at the crossing of Washington Road and McLaughlin Run Road was the center of the township activities in the past century. Here were the Inn, while on the stage road, a general store which also housed the post office which was called Upper St. Clair; a tinsmith's shop, a tannery, a shoemaker's shop, a wagonmaker's and a blacksmith's shops, as well as, a sawmill where flour could be ground. Here at the crossroads a daguerrotypist<sup>20</sup> sometimes came in his wagon which was both studio and home.

Lumber for most of the houses and barns for miles around was sawed here from oaks cut on the farms. The huge sawdust pile furnished material for paths around many homes and when in 1872 the mill burned down the sawdust continued to smolder for months.

Long ago the wholesale houses in Pittsburgh provided only the more essential items and the proprietor of this village store went regularly to Philadelphia for his nicer things. (We still have a silk shawl bought from Mr. Brody.) The boots and shoes of the men and boys and often the women were made of leather raised, tanned and made in the township; about 1856 shoes cost \$1.18 to \$2.50, boots \$4.00 to \$6.00. The tannery later became

<sup>19</sup> Rock-like by product of smoldering coal

<sup>20</sup> Photographer of the 1850's

But by 1844 mail was addressed to Upper St. Clair P.O. and there was delivery every Saturday at Squire Espy's Store by carrier who rode horseback on into Washington County, carrying the mail in his saddlebags.

During the Civil War the people were so anxious for news and letters that they secured two deliveries a week, Wednesdays and Saturdays. Latter the carrier, taking a very round-about route stopping at many post offices, rode out to Washington on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, returning on the alternate days.

When the Pittsburgh-Southern Railroad was built in 1878 there was mail from town each day, and when the Chartiers Railroad came through the western side of the township other post offices were established. A county map dated 1900 shows six: Upper St. Clair, Boyce Station, Borland, Essen, Beadling and Bridgeville.

Rural free delivery started about 1901 through the area served by the Upper St. Clair Postoffice, coming at first from Mansfield (Carnegie) but soon changed to Bridgeville. Gradually all but the Beadling Postoffice were closed as Rural Delivery routes covered the township.

*Continuing pages from the documentary will be published in the summer edition of **TODAY**.*

See ad for Gilfillan Farm, a premier property of the Historical Society of Upper St. Clair, in this issue's Celebration Guide, found on page 19.

**Learn how you can use the grounds for your soiree!**