

A Somerset County Historical Notebook

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AN HISTORICAL NOTEBOOK

NOTES BY JUDGE BLACK

The following is, in part, a letter to David Husband from Judge Jeremiah Sullivan Black. The letter itself was printed in the Somerset Standard on June 10, 1870.

To David Husband:

Dear Sir:

Your note was duly received announcing your purpose of collecting and preserving, as far as possible, at this late day, the events transpiring during the early period of the settlements of Somerset County; also desiring me to prepare an article embodying my recollections and traditional collections on the subject. In order to encourage you, I will give my own experience on the subject.

From information that I have gathered, there must have been a number of hunters within the limits of the county some years prior to its actual settlement, and among these were the Rhoads, who after hunting here for some time, brought out their families and probably were the first settlers within the present limits of the county. Before he sat himself down or built him a house, which he finally did, upon Stonycreek, where his son, Peter Rhoads, lived and died, he and some others were engaged hunting on the Buffalo about a mile south of Berlin, and standing on one spot, in three hours time they killed "twenty-three red deers." I am not hunter enough to say whether this be probable or not, but I enter for doubts.

Old Mr. Philip Weigley must have been among the earliest settlers, perhaps the next after Rhoads. He came to Brothersvalley, built a house, cleared five or six acres of land and sowed it in Rye. The next winter the snow was five to seven feet deep and lay without a thaw for nearly four months. He concluded that the climate would be intolerable and that he would take for his land what he could get, so that he might get off as soon as possible in the spring. He had paid \$50 for it,

and he thought if he could get that much he would be a fortunate man. Soon after the spring opened, three persons came along exploring the country for a place to locate themselves, and seeing his field of rye, which was a remarkable promising crop, they asked him what he would take for his place. He was afraid to put his price of \$50 upon it lest it might frighten them, and he therefore told them to make him an offer. They offered him \$150 and it astonished him so much that he broke the negotiation short off and told them he would not sell.

I do not know in what year my grandfather came there, but he was there several years as a young man before he was married, and his eldest child was born, I believe, about 1779. His first home was at a place William Will lived. From thence he moved to the place where my father lived and died.

You ought to get a full report of the trial of Huguel, the Frenchman, who was hanged in 1796. The trial is extant in print. I saw it long ago in a book entitled "The Awful Beacon." There are two other very remarkable murder cases which properly belong to the annals of Somerset County, although they were committed before the county was organized and tried at Bedford. One was that of Glessner by Sponneberger at Berlin. The other murder referred to was that of the Tissue family by a German redemptioner, in Elk Lick township.

There is one document in existence which I have often desired to get, and which, if it were produced, would throw a good deal of light upon the judiciary of the bar of the county sixty years ago. What I refer to is a copy of the Hudibrastic verses in the possession of Mr. Morrison and probably written by him. I do not know what its poetical merit may be, but its historical value I do not doubt.

You must not think of proceeding without a copy of the Somerset Whig before you. Select from it the notices of public events and transcribe all the