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Presentation of the Early Fairfield Town Lots

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Presentation of the Early Fairfield Town Lots

Abstract

What follows is a preliminary study of the Fairfield town lots, focusing on the owners and appearance of the lots up through the American Civil War. Because the existing records are sporadic, some of the lots were more difficult to research than others and will require further research at some future time. This was anticipated going into the project. But it is hoped that this study will provide a foundation for that future research. Undoubtedly, there are many surviving Fairfield deeds still in private hands. It is anticipated that this study will bring attention to the subject and lead to the further discovery of material on the history of the lots.
[*excerpt*]

Keywords

Adams County Historical Society, ACHS, Adams County, Pennsylvania History, Fairfield, Town Lots

Presentation

What follows is a preliminary study of the Fairfield town lots, focusing on the owners and appearance of the lots up through the American Civil War. Because the existing records are sporadic, some of the lots were more difficult to research than others and will require further research at some future time. This was anticipated going into the project. But it is hoped that this study will provide a foundation for that future research. Undoubtedly, there are many surviving Fairfield deeds still in private hands. It is anticipated that this study will bring attention to the subject and lead to the further discovery of material on the history of the lots.

Obviously, many properties have undergone a series of renovations over the years. Determining whether a house is the original structure, whether that original has been expanded or greatly altered, or whether the original has been completely replaced, is a very difficult matter. Deeds were often unrecorded officially. And where deeds exist, they are concerned mainly with the transfer of land, and often contain no details as to the structures or improvements on the property. A comprehensive study of an individual property is time consuming and includes an examination of existing deeds, tax records, estate papers, and notices of sale in local newspapers.

In addition, since history is really about people, this study is intended to provide information on those individuals who lived on the various lots. Using the year 1860 as benchmark, the ownership of the lots can be cross-referenced with the census recorded that year, thereby providing us with the names of the residents of the town on the eve of the American Civil War.

Town Lot #: When John Miller laid out the town in 1784, he established a numbering system for his lots. These numbers appear in early deeds and on an 1801 agreement between William Miller and the lot holders at that time. The same numbers appear on the map of Fairfield in the 1872 *Adams County Atlas*. I have studied many other towns in the area where properties were laid out in numbered lots, for the most part, in a simple, sequential order – Gettysburg, for instance, was originally numbered lot 1 through lot 210. The 1872 *Atlas of Adams County* contains examples of the lot numbering system in

many of these towns. The town of Fairfield, however, is unusual in that it was divided into four quadrants, which Miller refers to in his early deeds as Northwesterly, Northeasterly, Southwesterly, and Southeasterly, with each quadrant numbered separately, beginning with number 1. In other words, there are four lots in the town for each number. This has obviously caused problems over the years, and there are several examples where deeds give the incorrect lot number or quadrant. Eventually, the quadrant names were shortened to North, South, East, and West, and are shown on the map in the 1872 *Atlas* as N, S, E, and W. As a result of this confusion, many deeds, and most of the public sales notices published in local newspapers often give the lot numbers but rarely differentiate between the four quadrants. Interestingly, many early deeds refer to the numbers as lot first, second, or third, instead of lot one, two or three. As the town expanded over the years, additional lots were added to the western and eastern ends of the town as can be seen on the map in the 1872 *Atlas*. The additional lots were laid out by Miller and others to mimic the original plan. On the western side of the town, the numbering system is simply a continuation of Miller's. It is also apparent that the eastern lots were numbered by later developers, but their approach was not consistent, and the numbers are not always included in deeds. Additionally, there are several lots or parcels associated with the town, but which do not conveniently fit into the numbering system. I have identified these as outlying properties and placed them at the end of the descriptions.

Current Address: The current address refers to the address presently given to structures on the lot. Several lots have been divided over the years and have more than one address associated with them. A few of the properties are currently vacant and have no address. If known, I have given the address formerly associated with the property.

1860 Owner: As best as can be determined, the owner of each lot for the year 1860 is given. In the cases where deeds are available, this is a simple matter. In the instances where the name was established through the use of tax records, however, there may be some question as to the actual owner. This is especially true in the cases where a property was in the process of being transferred. The year 1860

has been chosen as the watershed date in this study for a number of reasons. It is immediately before the outbreak of the Civil War, a time of great interest to many historians studying our local history. Several of the buildings in Fairfield have Civil War building plaques or other markers denoting their association with events that occurred during the war. And perhaps most importantly, the 1860 census separates the borough of Fairfield from the rest of Hamiltonban Township, allowing us to make inferences as to the residents of specific properties in the town at that time.

Description: The description of the dwelling house or other structures on the property is based upon the best documentation concerning the appearance of the buildings in 1860.

Recital: The format given for the recital of the ownership of each property is entirely my own. The factors involved in determining the precise owner of a lot at any given time are very complex. Where deed references are available, a chain of ownership with exact dates is given. In many cases, especially where a reference to a will is involved, the sequence of heirs can be complicated. In those cases, I have simplified the language in the recital, to “heirs of,” until there is a clear settlement of the estate. The names of the wives are often given in the original deeds, but for the sake of simplicity, I have not included these in my recitals. Occasionally, the ownership is complicated by the death of a husband and the retention of property by the wife named in the deed. It should be noted, however, that a property owner was not required to record his deed at the courthouse and that most transfers were conducted privately, the deeds being passed from one individual owner to another. Where deeds are not available, other records have been used to determine the chain of ownership. The yearly tax records of Hamiltonban Township cite the individual responsible for the taxes of each of the lots in Fairfield, but these records are sparse prior to 1800, during the early formative years of the town. Additionally, the properties’ location is not given in tax assessments; and the entries for the town are simply mixed in with the entire Township of Hamiltonban. Fortunately, the transfer of a lot from one individual to another is often reflected in the tax records, this practice becoming more established as the years went by. And where the transfers are not specifically shown, inferences of

transfer can often be made by comparing the tax records year-by-year. It should be pointed out, however, that tax records contain frustrating gaps and often reflect inaccuracies or conflicts with known deeds. This is especially a problem when a tenant is the paying the tax on a property instead of the owner. For example, there may be some kind of mortgage agreement, and the mortgagee is paying the tax, and then there is a foreclosure and that mortgagee does not appear in a later deed recital, because there was never a clear transfer of the property. Fortunately, many records reference the adjoiners to a given lot, and I have used these names in place of other documentation. I have followed several general rules in this study: If an individual's name is followed by a specific date (i.e. month, day and year), the information is from a deed or other solid information. If an individual's name is followed by just a year, then an inference has been made, most likely through the tax records, for the date of initial ownership. If an individual's name is followed with a "by" and then a year, several sources reveal that the person is known to have owned the property by that date, but may have obtained it earlier. There may also be a gap in the recital that I have not been able to fill. In some cases I have indicated omissions by using "unknown," followed by the years in question. And if the individual's name is followed by an "in" and then a year, I found evidence that the person owned it during that one specific year, most likely because he was mentioned as an adjoiner in a deed or notice of property sale as printed in the newspaper. Last, I have not attempted to carry the recitals to the present day -- that would be a project worthy of attention, but beyond the scope of this study. I have concentrated on establishing the owners of the lots from the beginning of the town through at least the owner at the time of the Civil War, and then the next subsequent owner. Of great interest is the fact that the Fairfield Tax Records for the year 1919 record the street name and adjoiners for each tract of property accessed.

History of the Lot: The history of each lot focuses upon the following: the appearance of the lot through the years prior to the Civil War, and a discussion of the sources used to determine the transfer of the property; when the structure standing on the property was built; improvements that were made to the property over the years; and when the structure was removed in cases where it is no

longer standing. If the lot was still vacant at the time of the Civil War, an attempt was made to determine when the first structure (in many cases the structure now standing) was built.

1860 Residents: The 1860 residents for each dwelling house have been established by a careful study of the town of Fairfield as given in the enumeration for Hamiltonban Township, Adams County, Pennsylvania in the 1860 Census, as recorded on June 5 and 6, 1860. We are fortunate that the inhabitants of the town of Fairfield were separated from the rest of the township. We are also fortunate that the path of the census taker was relatively consistent, as he walked up and down the street from house to house, allowing us to make inferences as to the residents of each dwelling he visited. The exact dates of birth and death for each individual were established using the extensive collection of records at the Adams County Historical Society. These records include: family files, church records, tombstone inscriptions, and death notices from the local newspapers. In the absence of such records, the date of birth as reported in the 1860 census is given.

Family Notes: The family notes contain biographic information pertaining to the residents of the lots and interesting facts discovered during the research of the properties.

Civil War Notes: Since the focal point of this study is year 1860, an attempt has been made to uncover stories about the period of the American Civil War as they apply to specific properties or individuals in the town. Again, this approach has been adopted because of the great national interest in this period as it relates to the area.

Sources: There are general sources that were used for each and every lot in the study, including the 1858 wall map, the 1872 *Atlas of Adams County*, the 1860 census and the tax records for Hamiltonban Township. In addition, the card files and family files of the Adams County Historical Society were exhaustively consulted. Outside those general sources, specific references, including deeds and public sales notices, are given for each of the lots. This has been done, not just for purpose of documentation, but also to provide further avenues of research for those interested in learning more about the individual properties in this study.

Author's Note: I want to clarify what some readers may perceive as an inconsistency or source of confusion, involving the publication history of what was actually one newspaper: the problem is that an Adams County newspaper had various names at various times. It started as the *Centinel*, and then changed to the *Sentinel*, and after that to the *Adams Sentinel*. During this period, there was another totally separate newspaper, known as the *Star and Banner*. In 1867, the editor of the *Star and Banner* died, and the two papers merged, becoming the *Star and Sentinel*. Many authors are unaware of the changes and use the wrong names, so I have tried to be careful, citing the exact title of the paper in which the articles or notices appeared.

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Abbreviations

Adams County Deed Book---ACDB

Adams County Historical Society---ACHS

Grand Army of the Republic---GAR

Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission---PHMC

Unrecorded Deed---URD

York County Deed Book---YCDB