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Front Matter

ADAMS COUNTY HISTORY



1999

Volume 5

Contents

Editor's Note	2
Some Early Adams County Communities, Their Churches, and Church Lands by Charles H. Glatfelter	4
On the Trail of Sidney O'Brien: an Inquiry into Her Family and Status: Was She a Slave or Servant of the Gettys Family of Gettysburg? Was Her Daughter, Getty Ann, a Descendant of James Gettys? by Elwood W. Christ	43
The Civil War Letters of Jeremiah Mickly of Franklin Township, Adams County by Eric Ledell Smith	58
Index for Volume 1-5	75
prepared by Sheryl Snyder	
Contributors	87

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Editor's Note

*Like oil lamps, we put them out the back—. . .
What they survived we could not even live.
By their lights now it is time to
Imagine how they stood there, what they stood with,
That their possessions may become our power.*

—Eavan Boland

What many of us have come to accept as “normal” history is, as we know so painfully, hard enough to reconstruct, to resurrect into the light of consciousness so that others may appreciate something of how things originated as they have. There exist, however, even more obscure histories, records harder to get at. These are the stories of those dispossessed by history—say, the Amerindians and the African-Americans, people whose lives, during the time they lived, were not deemed sufficiently close enough to the historical and political and social centers of things to be taken note of in ways that future generations would be able to recognize how they indeed contributed to the unfolding of events.

In his fifth article for *Adams County History*, Elwood Christ examines the historical shards and oral traditions pertaining to James Gettys's black or mulatto slave or servant, Sidney O'Brien. Although she has emerged from our history with more definition than most of her contemporary African-Americans, Sidney O'Brien nonetheless remains a shadowy, half-mythical figure to us, one of history's dispossessed on two counts: she was both black and female. By squeezing information from every historical rock and pebble he could lay his eyes on, however, Woody has produced a credible portrait which may well typify the lives of blacks who lived out their now anonymous lives during Adams county's first decades.

Eric Ledell Smith also opens a window onto freed African-Americans, but his focus is somewhat different. Instead of concentrating on the lives of nineteenth-century blacks, Smith remembers the efforts of one man who tried to bridge the chasm between white and black worlds. Jeremiah Mickly, born in Franklin township, served as chaplain during the Civil War to a regiment of African-American soldiers. However one may be inclined to interpret his efforts, Mickly's extant letters (reprinted herein)

and published account suggest to us that some nineteenth-century whites, beyond the abolitionists, did not ignore or shut their eyes to what they perceived as the welfare of the black community.

Executive Director Charles H. Glatfelter's opening essay also addresses the broad issue of the historical and near-anonymity which often overtake the lives of those inhabiting the periphery of a culture, in the instance of his essay, some of the religious communities which struggled to carve out an existence on Pennsylvania's newly opened trans-Susquehanna frontier. Although he discusses the efforts of several local congregations to secure footholds in the new territory that lay "over Susquehanna," he focuses principally upon the small Episcopal community in Huntington township. We sometimes forget that in early eighteenth-century Pennsylvania, with its pluralistic culture, Quaker dominated politics and society, and a frontier strongly influenced by a veritable flood of Presbyterians, the Church of Englanders or Episcopalians eeked out the uncertain lives of people distrusted and even feared by their more numerous neighboring Protestant denominations: for unlike their fellow religionists in the colonies to the south, where the Anglican church was a powerful force, enjoying the privileges of an officially established creed, in Pennsylvania it had only weak, minority status. Glatfelter's article painstakingly sifts out of the bits and pieces of such archival evidence as its author could uncover to reveal how the first Anglican parishioners west of Susquehanna sought to establish and maintain their parish, Christ Church.

In a ground-breaking study 60 years ago, historian and critic Daniel Corkery set down what he could find relating to the eighteenth-century oral vestiges of the native culture of Ireland, one that had been virtually suppressed by the British Crown. He entitled his work *The Hidden Ireland*. Following Corkery's lead, perhaps it is not too fanciful to designate this collection of essays with a similar title—*The Hidden Adams County*.