

The History of Stonycreek Township

The sixth and last township of Somerset county created by the Bedford County Court was formed in 1799 out of a part of Quemahoning township. We have no record of its original boundaries, but it is said to have at one time included almost one-sixth of the present county. Shade and Paint townships were a part of it, and when a part of Londonderry township was annexed to Somerset county, that part of the present township of Allegheny, north of the Glade road, was attached to Stony Creek township. The township takes its name from the Stony creek (should we not call it river?) which for a part of its course flows through it and then becomes its western boundary. As a stream it takes its name from the rocky bed over which it flows in a great part of its course. Its Indian name was Sinne-Hanne or Achsin-Hanne. Hanne, meaning a stream and especially a swift mountain stream. A good part of the township as it now exists consisted of Glades, "The Stony Creek Glades," by which name the entire region was for a long time known in the eastern part of the state. The present northern boundary of the township is the Bedford and Greensburg turnpike. The southern boundary is the Somerset and Bedford pike. The area of the township is about 50,000 acres. As a whole the soil is fertile, and there are many fine farms.

The township was settled at a very early day. If the traditions of the German Baptist Church (referred to elsewhere) are correct even within a couple of years, there were settlers already here before this region was open to legal settlement. In addition to the names of early settlers that have been mentioned in other chapters, Israel Burket, John Rhoads, Martin Suter and Christopher (or Christian) Yoder and his sons were here as early as 1775, or perhaps even earlier. Christopher and Abraham Miller Godfrey Raymon, Cristopher Spiker, Samuel Spiker, Jacob Smith John Yoder, James Ross, James Black, Henry Hess and Jacob Lambert were all here in 1783, and in that year the families of these and others known to have been here numbered 116 persons. When Somerset county was formed in 1795, the township, particularly the central and southern portions, may be looked upon as having been already quite well settled. The assessment records for 1796 on file in the commissioner's office show the names of 126 taxables. In connection with this matter of earlier settlers, there are claims made not only in this but in almost every other township in the county, that this or that person had settled in the township at or about a given time, that are not borne out by the tax records of that period, and in some instances their names do not appear for long years thereafter. Everyone who owned land is presumed to have paid taxes on it, and there was no more chance of a farm having escaped the notice of the assessor than there is now.

The first voting place in Somerset county was at the house of James Black. There being but one in the entire county.

In 1798, Henry Brant, Conrad Hite, David Kimmell, John Statler, William McDermitt and Cornelius Martenus were tavern keepers, presumably on the Pennsylvania and Glade roads. James Black had a tanyard. Stony Creek township claims the honor of having been the birthplace of Judge Jeremiah S. Black, one of the most eminent men of his time. The village of Shanksville had its beginning as early as 1798. St that time Christian Shank had his dwelling here, and also owned two saw mills. About the same time Mr. Shank built a grist mill. This mill was destroyed by fire in 1830, and it was rebuilt by Jacob Shank on the same site. Christian Shank also built a woolen and carding mill. This, however, has long since ceased operation. The only other mill of this kind in the township is the one known as Hill's factory, on Calender's run. Christian Shank laid out the village of Shanksville in 1829. There had, however, been a few houses built here before that time. Emanuel Shafer opened a store in 1828. A store, however, had been opened in the township about one mile southeast of Shanksville, as early as 1820, by Augustus Coffroth. The first hotel in the village was kept by Daniel Brant. The post office was established in 1847, with Josiah Brant as the first postmaster.

The village was visited by a disastrous fire on August 24, 1889, which started on the second floor of Floto & Baltzer's store. This building, the store, residence and warehouse of Chauncev A. Brant, the dwelling house and an office building of Charles Shank, two dwellings belonging to Josiah J. Walker, and the county bridge over Stony creek, were all destroyed, causing a loss of upwards of \$20,000. The Lutheran church was struck by lightning July 4, 1903, and destroyed. With all this, the place is thriving and prosperous. There are upwards of fifty dwellings, three churches, seven stores, two planing mills, and a flouring mill.

Lambertsville is a small village in the northwest part of the township. Abraham Lambert built the first house about 1855, and he also owned the land on which the village has since grown up. There has been a post office here since 1885. The Lambert family has numerous representatives in this part of the county. They are the descendants of three brothers--John, George and Jacob--who were among the pioneer settlers. The early Lamberts were noted

hunters, and many stories of their prowess are still extant.

The south side of the village of Buckstown is also in StonyCreek township. Downey is a small village, with three stores, about two miles southeast of Shanksville. Coleman, Kimmelton and Mostoller are stations and post offices on the Somerset and Cambria railroad. Boone and Stony Creek are country post offices.

The township has sixteen schools. Except that the Somerset and Cambria railroad skirts the township along the Stonycreek, it has not yet been penetrated by railroads. But as there are many thousands of acres of good coal lands that have already been sold to capitalists, the day when it will be cannot be far distant.



Our Town, Shanksville 1798-1975

Our town, Shanksville was named by its founder, Christian Shank in 1798. He was an immigrant from Germany, coming to Hagerstown, MD prior to 1797. Later he came to Berlin, PA. And cut a road to the place that he named Shanksville. He built a cabin on the south side of the Stonycreek River, where the D.L.Stull house now stands next to the dodge garage. Traveling with him were his family and Isaac Wendel who was Christian's carpenter and mill right. Mr. Wendel's family also traveled with them.

In 1829 Christian laid out the village of Shanksville. He had a gristmill on the dam below his cabin also two sawmills and a woolen mill. A few houses were there before this time. Earlier the Iroquois indians, who were not always friendly, roamed back and forth in western PA, because of the wonderful hunting and fishing. Later this territory was ceded to Thomas and Richard Penn for the sum of 10,000 pounds.

Some of the early settlers were; Michael Graff, John Musser, John Lambert, Abe Miller, Christian Yoder and Jake Kimmel.

In 1848 the union church was erected and later the united brethren, Lutheran and reformed built their own churches. In August 1899, lightning struck the steeple of the Lutheran church and burned. The pews and the stained glass windows were saved and are still used in the church on Main Street.

A pot bellied stove heated the United Brethern Church and kerosene lamps were used for light. The church was torn down in 1887. The present church was built in 1912. The Reformed Church was a frame building replaced with a brick one now being used as a dwelling. The preachers walked many miles over mud roads to reach their people, and many times had to stay overnight because of distance. People walked as much as five miles through blizzards to get to the revival meetings in winter.

At one time Shanksville had seven stores, two millinery shops, two blacksmith shops, one tin shop, a coffin house, two planing mills, a gristmill, butter factory tannery and carding factories. Also a brick yard and pottery factory.

Emmanuel Shaffer opened the first store in 1828. The Hon. E.H. Schrock bought the store in 1858 and built a large trade. He owned the tannery, manufacturing all kinds of leather goods. He also dealt in butter, shipping it to Baltimore in 50 lb. Kegs.

Neighborliness was the trend in those days. Scarcely was there a field or woods without paths where neighbors traveled to help someone in need.

There was a time in 'our town' when everyone was a "mechanic" of some kind. There were two cabinet making shops, one run by David Ross and Sons, the other by Jacob Clark. Two wagon making shops, one operated by Benjamin Baldwin, the other by William Finneycy and Hen Smith. They made harrows, cultivators, sleds and farming implements. Jacob Brant and Benjamin Keefer made pumps and tiling. Henry Grady opened a pottery shop in 1840. The Spangler Brothers were noted for being fine brick makers. Many excellent bricklayers, stone masons, carpenters and plasterers emerged from their descendents to this day.

The Shanksville post office was opened in 1874. Josiah Brant was the first postmaster. Before this the mail was brought from Berlin. There were no envelopes or stamps. The letters were folded and stamped with a red seal and

U.S. was pressed into it to make it legal. There were no pens; writing was done with a goose quill.

Both English and German were spoken but it appears German and PA Dutch were the languages used most.

Some of the early settlers taught their children in their own cabins. All that was required to become a teacher was to be able to read and write. There were some teachers of good character, but others were tramps and drunkards. Children had to walk as far as five miles to school and parents had to pay for each child. Shanksville borough and township now have a fine consolidated school. It's a far cry from the one and two room school houses where you locked the teacher out, but you were taught the A-B-C's up to the eighth grade. Then you were taught algebra, drama and elocution. With several weeks of summer school you too were ready to teach. The children from fifteen one-room schools in the township also attended the new school.

The first physician opened an office in Shanksville in 1840. Making his calls on horseback, buggy or on foot. Later three other doctors built homes. Dr Bickel built the Helen Daugherty house (large white house two or three houses up from the bank) at the end of town. Dr Krisinger built the John Baltzer house, and recently Dr. Orlidge. Dr Savitz had the equivalent of a clinic in the old hotel that is the green house on the corner of main street, which is the second oldest house in Shanksville. Operating in the back room several times a week he removed many a child's tonsils for \$12.50. Along with this they had a registered nurse at no extra cost.

Shanksville experienced a dreaded diphtheria epidemic many years before the vaccine. Families lost many children. Upon returning home from burying a child they would find another child had died. The custom was to toll the church bells when some one had died. Each toll was for a year of their age; thus telling the townspeople if it was a child or an adult.

Many home remedies were used, the one I like best is for tisc. (asthma). My grandfather Shank measured the height of my Uncle George on the doorframe, marked it and made a hole there. Then cutting a lock of Uncle George's hair stuffed it in the hole. When he grew above the mark he would be cured. His brother declares he was.

June 4, 1859 was the year of the "big frost." everything was killed, fruits, vegetables and grain. The farmers were panic stricken thinking of a famine. Flour prices rose from \$7 a barrel to \$18 and was soon bought up. One crop had not been planted, buckwheat. They planted and had a record crop, 183,000 bushels.

August 23, 1899 was the "big fire." it started in the Baltzer and Flote store that was a story and a half building. They bought rags from the people and stored them in the top of the building until the rag man came through town singing;

"Any rags? Any bones? Any bottles today? I'm going down south, and I'm going this way."

The fire supposedly started in these rags. It burned the covered bridge and five buildings on Bridge Street. The town was saved by the bravery of the men who formed the bucket brigade to the roof of the hotel on the corner of Main and Bridge Street. If it had caught fire the whole town would have burned. Elmer Stutzman kept the roof from catching on fire.

June 6, 1917 a cyclone hit Stonycreek Twp. killing Charley Stutzman and damaging his barn.

March 17, 1936 was the biggest flood Shanksville ever had.

For entertainment there were home talent shows held in two town halls. One above Spangler's (Orpha's father) store; the other above Baltzer's. They were equipped with a large stage, a pot-bellied stove and kerosene lamps. In the Baltzer's basement you could buy homemade ice cream, candy, warm pop and a great oyster stew every Saturday night. Also in the Sam Fox hotel was an ice cream parlor. Marvelous ice cream was dipped with a cone shaped dipper which was turned to make the ice cream come out in the cone.

Oh yes, and speaking of the hotel, Shanksville wasn't always 'dry.' In 1865 J. Stull sold liquor in the hotel bar. He became very ill and destroyed his license; telling god if he cured him the license would go. Upon recovering he decided to get it back. The woman would have no part of that. They got out a remonstrance and it has never been sold since.

The next hotel owners were Harrison Ringler, Mrs. Doc Musser and Sam Fox. When the drummers (salesman) came to town and dinner was over, Mrs. Fox did not have enough food left. She sent out word to the neighbors and they brought in their leftovers and they had a great meal.

Every Saturday night the streets were lined with horses and buggies.

Back to entertainment--the first band was the Walker Band, composed of the entire Walker Brothers; Frans, Joe, Lew, Ed, George, Charley, Bruce and Will. Oh yes, there was one outsider, a brother-in-law, and Ed Lowery. Next came the Shanksville band. They played in the round open bandstand where the car wash is now located. It was directed by Marsh Eichleberger.

Medicine shows came to town with music and bottled "cure alls." Gypsy bands always camped by the old State Bridge. They would entertain the people with dancing and fiddle playing. Next day they would come begging, telling fortunes and stealing if possible.

The State Bridge was a covered bridge and they tried for years to get the funds to repair it. When they finally got the funds, but before they could get started it collapsed into the creek.

A camp meeting of all black folks was held in the Pines, west of the former covered bridge along Stonycreek. Most of the pines are still standing. It was an inspiration to everyone.

Now and then a one-ring circus came to town. Then there were hay rides, sleighing parties, sometimes ending up at the Fox Hotel for a chicken and waffle dinner. Then there were quilting parties, taffy pulls, spotsy parties, apple snitzing, and apple butter and cider making with several horses walking in a circle turning a press making cider. The great excitement of butchering, and husking corn in the barn. And if you got a red ear of corn, you either got kissed or you got to kiss a pretty girl. Of course there was a little square dancing and even some card parties on the sly.

Many tramps traveled the roads. They had a way of telling each other where to stop to get a meal for free. We kids were afraid of them and we ran for cover under a porch or any available hiding place. The farmers let them sleep in the barn if they would give up their matches and promise not to smoke.

There were many peddlers with packs on their backs going from door to door. It was a mystery how they could get so much in their packs and a source of wonder and amazement when they opened it. Everything was in the pack from pots and pans to patent medicines.

Much could be said about the Halloween pranks, such as painting Mr. Grady's horse with stripes to look like a zebra or putting the wagons on top of shed roofs--one time even putting a cow on the shed roof. There were upset outside toilets and steps taken away from porches, even while people were standing on the porch.

People believed in 'signs.' For example, someone was going to die if a bird flew against the window, Dishes rattling in the cupboard, knocking, and chains rattling were hauntings. Was it real or imaginative?

One of the big lumber camps down in Stonycreek was called the Goodrich Camp. It was a camp of hard working, burly lumbermen until payday came around. After work they all came to town. Grandpa Shank said that he would run for home because he was afraid of them. All the lumbermen carried guns to protect themselves from all the wild animals that roamed the woods, such as panthers, wolves, bears etc. As the evening wore on and the liquor flowed freely the men became boisterous. They threw each other in the old water trough that stood at the end of town and then shooting in the air and more horseplay. It was those nights that the local boys stayed home.

Weddings were a time of celebration, big dinners, serenading or bull binding with pots and pans until the bridegroom paid up. If a younger daughter got married before the older sister, the older one was supposed to dance in the hog trough. If someone was going to call on a girl but wanted to keep it a secret and someone found out, they would make a trail out of sawdust going from the girls house to the guy's door. The married couple didn't go far on their honeymoon because of the mode of travel. I know Mom and Dad Hunter went north past Fraziers to the crossroad, turned right and went on to Walker Dam (which is now Lake Stonycreek) and then back home.

A favorite day was Decoration Day or now Memorial Day. The young people, chaperoned by an adult, went to the woods and gathered pine, evergreens, and flowers to make wreaths to put on the soldiers graves. The old soldiers were given a wreath and they put it on a comrades grave with a flag. The parade was half as long as the town with everyone walking. Some of the old soldiers were; Jefferson Shank, grandson of Christian, Martin Shank, John Ream, William Fox, Noah Keefer, Manus Baldwin, Peter Spangler, Charles Spangler, Jacob Spangler, George Spangler and others. There were two mens lodges in town, the Order of Eagles and the Mechanics.

Threshing was another day of hard labor but also a day of fellowship. The threshing machine, pulled by a steam engine, was a wonderful sight to see. Husbands and wives and kids all turned out to help their neighbors as they went from farm to farm. The tables groaned with all the food the women prepared for the hungry men; country ham, chicken, beef, pork sausage and everything that goes with it. The children stood by with fly chasers made of shredded paper to keep the flies away from the food. Their mouths watered at the sight of all that food. Many fine cattle were raised on the fine green fields of Somerset County. The Centennial ox was raised by Samuel Barley and weighed in at 4,700 lbs. It was exhibited in the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 and was likely the largest ox in the world.

There were three dams in the Shanksville area, the Hen Glessner, the Harvey Glessner and the Walker Dam. The Stonycreek river flows through Shanksville and was named in the Christopher records of 1750 because of its wide stoney channel. The river flows through the valley towards the mighty Mississippi.

The tombstone of Christian Shank can be seen in the Lutheran Cemetery at Glade. The carving is still very plain. We have not been able to find his wife or sons graves.

In conclusion, "our town" in the year 1975 has two grocery stores, one service station, one automobile dealership, a barber shop, two welding shops, one building supply store, a car wash, consolidated school, one doctor, beautician, post office, several antique shops and a modern bank. Mr. Jerry Baltzer was the banker for many years, sitting in his feed store cashing checks.

Within two miles are two recreational areas--Lake Stonycreek and Indian Lake--where the people enjoy boating, fishing, skiing and picnicing.

We have the Silver and Gold club, scout troops, little league and the fire company, along with the ladies auxiliary. We have three churches with all of their many activities. The school has many activities and has a modern cafeteria serving hot meals.

The men still gather in the store and the post office to talk over and solve the problems of the day. But something is missing, the cracker barrel, the cake boxes with the glass door, the cheese laying on the meat block along with the boxes of grapes on the rack. All these things were sampled regularly during the "talks" with never a thought of paying.

The mayor and council run the town. We may not have a street lit with neon lights or a restaurant, but we are well fed. We don't have a theater, but the type of pictures produced today make us think we're not missing too much. We do have fresh air, room to breathe, beautiful maple, pine, hickory, and oak trees. As I sit here completing this paper, I'm looking out over the beautiful blue and green waters of Lake Stonycreek. To the north, the breast of Indian Lake is covered with crown vetch. Raising my eyes, I'm dazzled by the brilliance of red, green, orange, yellow and brown fall foliage. Looking up into the blue and white sky, all I can say is "how great thou art."

By Ruth Hunter Wilson in collaboration with her mother Nelle Shank Hunter(1888-1996). Direct descendants of Christian Shank. 1975.

Source:

The following is reprinted from Blackburn & Welfley's "History of Bedford & Somerset Counties," 1906. Lewis Publishing Co. Vol. II, p. 641-643.



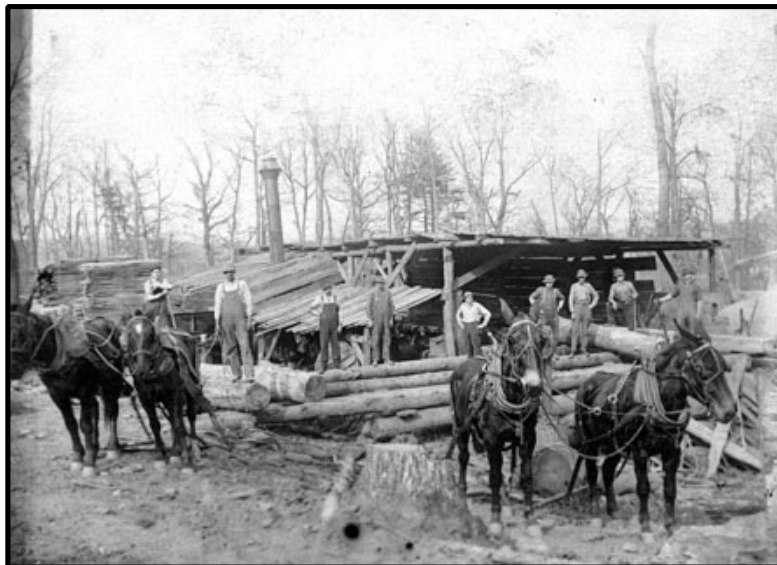
Early Shanksville Photos: Postcards, Odds



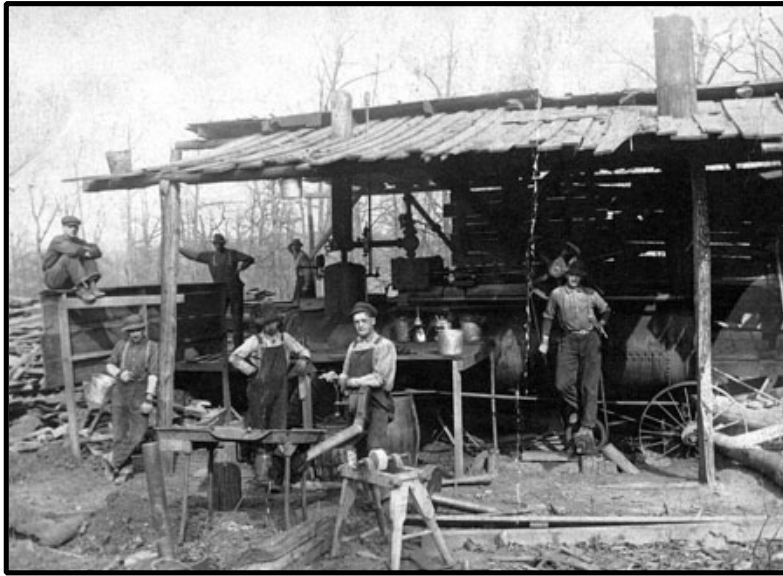
Early shot of Shanksville. Date unknown



This postcard was mailed in Jan. of 1913. Caption says "Street view looking west, Shanksville, PA."



Saw Mill at Shanksville



Reformatted: 19 March 2022
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