

In the Spotlight

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LIVING HISTORY



by Gene Pisasale



Bronze historical marker at gravestone of Dr John Maffitt.



Mason-Dixon Line stone marker showing P for Pennsylvania on Gruber Farm.

Elk Township: A rural community with an interesting heritage

By Gene Pisasale
Contributing Writer

Among the 57 Townships in Chester County, Elk Township gets less attention than most of the others due to its rural setting.

It is somewhat distant from bustling towns like West Chester. While Elk Township is small and rural, there are several things dotting the landscape which do attract the attention of visitors. Two of them are beautiful Big Elk Creek and Little Elk Creek; the others are historic wooden structures which span the two waterways. Together they make a lovely combination of rustic countryside and human innovation which add to the appeal of this sparsely populated area.

Elk Township saw its first European settlers in the early 18th century. The deed for the land was granted by William Penn in 1701. The area experienced more than 150 years of settlement before the Township was officially formed from a part of East Nottingham Township in 1857. Its 10.4 square miles make it one of the smallest in Chester County. With a population density of only 168 persons per square mile, it has plenty of open space, much of it near an historic line.

Elk Township's southern boundary was influenced by

a visit from two surveyors, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, who, starting in 1763, worked diligently to resolve the long-standing border dispute between the descendants of William Penn and Lord Baltimore.

Elk Township has seven stone markers along the historic Mason-Dixon Line, more than any other Township. A visit to the farm of local resident Mary Gruber allowed photographs of one of the markers, the "P" and "M" carvings on the stone indicating the Pennsylvania and Maryland sides of the border. The Old Stone Graveyard nearby displays the gravestones of Revolutionary War patriots. There, a brass plaque stands honoring Dr. John Maffitt, who was the ship's doctor on the USS Reprisal that took Benjamin Franklin to France to serve as representative for the 13 colonies. Gruber and her husband own three local farms as well as the popular Old Stone Cider establishment.

The area once featured numerous mills, situated on both Big Elk Creek and Little Elk Creek. One of the villages got its name from them. In "Around the Oak" by the Oxford Area Tricentennial Publications Committee, Elk Mills is described as a thriving village around which numerous mills were located. Legend has it that Henry

Hollingsworth had a mill on Little Elk Creek in 1724. A saw and gristmill was owned and operated by Jesse Woolens and later by James Brown, who was appointed Postmaster when a Post Office was opened there in 1869. The mill was subsequently purchased by Lewis Sharpless in 1880. Mill owners must have been popular Postmasters. Sharpless was appointed Postmaster in 1882 and served in that position until 1909, when the Post Office closed.

According to "Around the Oak," the Little Elk Friends Meeting was established in 1824 in Nottinghamdale, which later got its own Post Office when the town changed its name to Hickory Hill in 1850. Small towns are the norm here. Lewisville is one of them, benefiting from the intersection of Route 841 and Route 472 nearby.

Something you do not see in most townships today is a lot of covered bridges. Elk Township had three of them. Noted in "Covered Bridges of Chester County, Pennsylvania" by Arthur E. James, the Rudolph and Arthur Covered Bridge was built over Big Elk Creek by Meanander Wood and Richard Meredith in 1880 for \$2,334. There was a dam nearby on the creek which powered a paper mill, where members of the Rudolph and Arthur families worked. The bridge span was 80 feet with a Burr truss structure passing over the creek. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. Sadly, the bridge was destroyed by the remnants of Hurricane Ida in September of 2021.

The Linton Stevens Bridge was named in honor of the Postmaster at Hickory Hill, just southwest of the bridge. In his book, James mentions that Stevens operated the Post Office in his general store. Not far from this bridge is the intersection with two other townships—East Nottingham and New

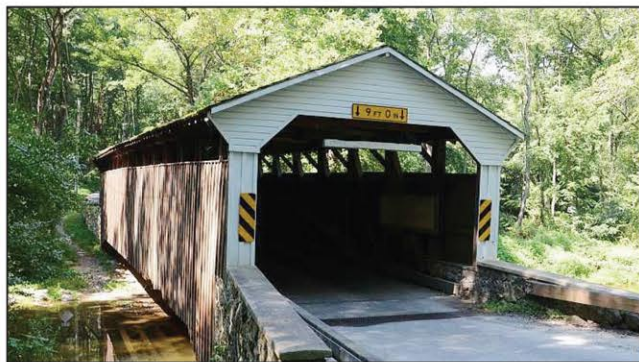


Photo courtesy of John Loxton

The Linton Stevens Covered Bridge.

London. There was a foot bridge at this site as shown on an 1874 map of New London Township, with a later iron structure replacing it. Subsequently the Linton Stevens wooden covered bridge with a 102-foot span was constructed there. It is one of the scenic wonders of rural Chester County.

The Glen Hope Bridge was built over Little Elk Creek in 1889 a half-mile north of the Pennsylvania-Maryland state line. This bridge has a 65-foot span with a 26-foot roadway. Meanander Wood was busy- he also built this one. James notes that Wood was paid \$994 for the woodwork; George E. Jones did the stone work for \$773, for a total cost of \$1,767. The bridge was seriously damaged in 1962 when a careless truck driver took his vehicle exceeding the bridge's weight limit onto the structure. It was out of commission for several months, but later repairs brought it back to good working condition.

If you're looking for a drive away from the bustle of daily life, consider a visit to Elk Township. Rural vistas, peaceful countryside and covered bridges will bring you a sense of yesteryear, when the pace of things was just a bit slower. Stop in at Old Stone Cider and enjoy some draught beer or cider

with live music on Saturdays through the fall. You can get a sense of the topography which two surveyors trekked more than 250 years ago when they helped the Keystone State get its official southern boundary.

Gene Pisasale is an historian, author and lecturer based in Kennett Square. His ten books focus on the history of the Chester County/mid-Atlantic region. His latest work is *Forgotten Founding Fathers: Pennsylvania and Delaware in the American Revolution*. His books are available on his website at www.GenePisasale.com and on www.Amazon.com. Gene can be reached via e-mail at Gene@GenePisasale.com.



Courtesy photo

Old Stone Cider in Lewisville, Elk Township.

Mason-Dixon Line pole marker.



Graverey displaying headstones and markers for Revolutionary War patriot soldiers on Gruber property.