THE ELSER HOMESTEAD AND FAMILY HISTORY.

The Elser homestead, better known as Elser's saw mill, is located on Middle Creek, in Clay township, about one-half mile southeast of the village of Clay. The original tract contained 104 acres of limestone land, while the tract at present contains 96 acres and 80 perches. This farm was once the camping grounds of the Indians. On a recent visit by the writer to the farm, the spots where the wigwams stood, their happy hunting grounds, and where the medicine man pounded or ground the roots for their medicine were pointed out. The last mentioned place is a large limestone rock, just below the bridge which spans the Middle Creek, on the road leading to the Horseshoe turnpike, on which the bowl-shaped cavities, three in number, can be seen.

We will now leave the homestead for a little while and take up for our consideration the history of the family.

The Elser Family.

Peter Elser,the first ancestor,whose full name we learn from family documents was Johan Peter Elser, was the son of Hans Adam and Mary Margaretha Elser, daughter of Frederick and Mary Barbara Hager, and a native of Russheim, Germany. It appears that the father, Hans Adam Elser, died in the Fatherland, and that some time after his death the widow with her children decided to come to America. At this time her son, Peter, was past the age of sixteen years. As

all male immigrants having reached that age were required to subscribe to an oath of allegiance, we, accordingly,find his name on the official records of the State.

Among the list of passengers on board the good ship "Ann," Capt. John Spurrier, master, which arrived in port at Philadelphia on September 28, 1849, from Rotterdam, Holland, we find the names of Henry Mock and Peter Elser, and,of course, his mother and three sisters, but whether as Mrs. Mock or Mrs. Elser we do not know, for the reason that the names of the women are not given in the ship's register. The entire party located in the ancient Warwick settlement, of which the village of Brickerville was about the center. Here was formed one of the earliest Lutheran congregations in the present limits of the county of Lancaster, and which was known as the Warwick Church, now known as Emmanuel's.

We learn from existing documents of an agreement, or contract, of one Henrich Mock, of Warwick township, Lancaster county, and his wife, which sets forth that he (Mock) agrees to accept and provide for her children left under her care by her late husband, Hans Adam Elser, as his own. The children mentioned are Christina, Peter, Barbara and Eve. This document is dated April 28, 1753.

From the above we infer that the widow, Elser, married Henry Mock soon after their arrival in America.

Christina Elser, Peter's sister, was born July 13, 1729; died June 17, 1779. On November 25, 1754, she was united in marriage with George Michael Eichelberger, born September 29, 1733, and died January 22, 1789. The ceremony was performed by Rev. Casper Stoever. They located in Warwick, now Clay township, on the farm at present owned by John F. Seibert.

November 8, 1758, George Stober and Eva Elser were married by Rev. Stoever. They located in Cocalico township, near Schoeneck.

Tradition says that Barbara Elser, sister to Peter, was married to a Mr. Wolfert.

We will now take up for consideration the son, Peter Elser, who now also realized that it was not well for man to be alone, for we find him taking unto himself a wife five years before he became a subject to King George the Third of England. His bride was Anna Margaret, daughter of Rev. John Casper Stoever,andthe marriage took place November 16, 1760, the ceremony being performed by her father. His wife was born August 3, 1738. Peter Elser was granted his naturalization papers October 15, 1765, the papers being dated at Philadelphia. Soon after his marriage he acquired some land and became a thrifty farmer and influential citizen of the province. He also operated a saw-mill and hemp-rolling mill. He died in 1789, leaving a will which can be seen at the Court House here. The children born to this union were as follows: John, Adam, George, Peter, Christian, Johannes, Michael and Margaretta. Adam, the first son, died soon after attaining his majority. George,the second son, left the homestead in the beginning of the year 1789, and located at Hanover, York county, where he, in the same year, married Catharine Summers, the oldest of a family of twenty-three children. In the year 1806 he migrated to the State of Ohio, locating in Mahoning county, near the present town of New Springfield. His father-in-law had preceded him four years previous. He had five sons, as follows: Jacob, born in 1802, and died at the age of eighty-five years; John, who died at

the age of eighty-three years; George, who died at the age of eighty-nine years; Peter, not quite so old; and Samuel, who died single. His descendants are numerous, and are located in the States of Ohio, Indiana, Iowa and California.

Peter, the third son, held forth at the homestead, became a prosperous farmer and a highly-respected citizen.

Johannes was born February 18, 1791, and died September 20, 1870. He was married to Elizabeth Kimmel, daughter of Jacob Kimmel, who died December 25, 1851. Soon after his marriage he resided in the vicinity of Graver's, now Metzler's, mill, near Ephrata. A little later he bought the farm known as the "Johannes Elser farm," now owned by Zach Forry, near the village of Clay, where he was engaged in the hotel and store business and farming. In the year 1833 he was appointed Justice of the Peace. It was here that the Durlach postoffice was established in the year 1840, with his son, Harrison, as postmaster. In politics Mr. Elser was a staunch Democrat, serving for a number of years as a member of the County Committee.

The Elsers were followers of the Lutheran faith, and were prominently identified with the Warwick, now Emmanuel's, Church of Brickerville. Peter Elser served as trustee from 1769 to 1772. Peter Elser, Jr., also took a keen interest in the affairs of the church. Among the list of subscribers to the erection of the Emmanuel's Church, which was erected in 1805 and 1807, appearing in the treasurer's book of the building committee, is Mr. Elser's name. He heads the list with 60 pounds. In the same book also appears the following entry: "1807, May 11, Peter Elser presented a nice log, sawed same to lath, and

delivered same to be used at the new church." Samuel Elser was one of the pillars, serving as a member of the church council from early life until the time of his death.

The Homestead.

It appears that on January 3, 1738, a warrant was issued to one Michael Kitch, for this tract, but Kitch not complying with the terms of the warrant, the land was surveyed March 13, 1749, for Martin Weidtman, and April 26, 1750, a patent for the same was granted Michael Shank, who, on April 13, 1750, conveyed the same to Henry Mock, who, now being settled in his new home, at once set to work clearing the land and otherwise improving it. Whether a house had been erected prior to his coming, or if he erected one, or whether it was of log or stone, I will not venture to say. But I know for a fact that one had been erected prior to any of these on the premises at the present day. Its site, as pointed out to the writer, was about midway between the present farm house and barn, a little south of where a large tobacco shed now stands.

Henry Mock and wife April 20, 1761, conveyed the farm to Peter Elser. The house standing near the tail race and adjoining the saw-mill was erected by him in the year 1770. It is a one and a-half story limestone structure.

This house was occupied as a dwelling house until about twenty years ago. Since that time it has been used as a storage house. The last one to reside therein was Mrs. Hannah O. Mellinger, of Brickerville, a great-granddaughter of Peter Elser. It is also this house which the writer claims as his birthplace, the event having taken place nearly two score

and six years ago. The masonry of this building is still in good condition.

The farm was then transferred to his sons. The joint ownership was, however, of short duration, as George sold his undivided one-half interest to his brother, Peter, by deed dated August 10, 1789, and George then started out to seek his fortune. Peter, now being sole owner, proceeded to make still further improvements to the premises. The farmhouse was erected by him, tradition says, in 1803, and the date stone was placed in position four years later. It reads: "Built by Peter Elser in 1807." The building is a limestone structure, 30 by 38 feet, two stories high.

All the buildings enumerated are standing to-day, are in good condition, and bid fair to withstand the elements for another century.

Daniel Graybill, by his indenture, bearing date April 1, 1814, conveyed to Peter Elser a tract of mountain land, containing 36 acres and 149 perches and allowance. The tract is situated in Elizabeth township. A patent for the same was granted Mr. Elser under date of January 30, 1844. This tract is still known as "Elser's Orchard," and, though now divided into smaller tracts, is still, with one exception, owned by some of the descendants.

Peter Elser left a will by the terms of which the farm passed to his son, Samuel, and which, under successful management, became very productive. Up to this time the farmers, in order to market their products, had to haul them by wagon to the larger towns. It was on this farm that the writer for the first time saw a "Conestoga wagon."

Samuel Elser died intestate, and the farm was bought by his son, John O., in 1880, who continued at farming and

also made some improvements. The homestead, after having been in the Elser family for a period of 134 years, passed into the hands of strangers. Caroline and Mary A. Barnett, as per deed dated December 14, 1895, recorded in the Recorder's office at Lancaster, in Deed Book E, volume 15, page 407, became the owners.

The Old Cider Mill.

The farm was now rented, and, as a consequence, many changes have been wrought to the place. Our story would not be complete if we should fail to make mention of the old cider mill and press which stood midway between the saw-mill and barn. This mill was kept busy from early morning until late at night during cider-making season.

The mill was wiped out of existence about fourteen years ago. The present owner of the farm is H. H. Moore, of Lancaster, and it is tenanted by Daniel Bookmyer.

The Saw Mill.

It is with regret that I am not able to give a date when the saw-mill was erected. Family tradition says that Henry Mock built the first one a little to the east of the present one. The building is about 56 feet long, 14 feet wide, and 8 feet high to the square. The carriage is twenty-seven feet long, and logs twenty-five feet long and four feet in diameter could be sawed thereon.

The Hemp Rolling Mill.

The building was about twenty feet square, and two stories high, the first being of limestone and the second of frame, and stood on the east side of the penstock. When the building was erected I will not venture to say, but tradition says it was erected by Peter

Elser, Sr. An extension was built to the penstock from which the water was supplied to run the water wheel, which was of the undershot type, four feet wide and twelve feet in diameter. The water wheel shaft extended well into the first story of the building, which,by means of wooden cogwheels, was connected to an upright shaft, extending to the ceiling of the second floor, or projecting into a box securely fastened to a cross beam, thus holding the shaft in position. A spindle was attached to the main shaft, on which a conical-shaped stone, whose dimensions were sixteen inches at the small end, thirty-eight inches at the base, its altitude twenty-eight inches, and approximate weight sixteen hundred pounds, revolved on its axis, on a platform which was raised about three feet above the level of the floor, so as to be more convenient for the operator. The hemp was placed on this platform, under the revolving stone,which crushed the fiber. The hemp had to be occasionally turned, or shaken, the same as wheat or oats when threshed with horses.

This was the first process of the many ones through which the hemp had to go before it was ready to be woven into cloth, which was mostly used for grain bags, chaffbags and ropes. Hemp and flax culture was extensively carried on by the early settlers, and, this being the only mill in this part of the country, it had a large patronage. About the year 1882 John O. Elser remodeled the mill, whereby the speed was trebled, and the operator was enabled to move the carriage backward by merely pressing a lever. Further changes were made by Joseph Barnett, he discarding the old-fashioned water wheel and substituting a turbine wheel. The mill had been in operation for a

period of about 150 years, but for the past two years it has not been in running order, and before long it will be a thing of the past.

It ceased to operate about the year 1846. In later years a jig saw and a turning lathe were installed by John O. and Peter O. Elser, sons of Samuel Elser, but, it not proving a profitable venture, the building was demolished by John O. Elser, about the year 1890.

Now nothing but the stone used in the mill remains as a mute reminder of a once thriving industry.

Military Record.

Among those serving from Lancaster county during the Revolutionary period we note the following:

Peter Elser, served in Capt. John Feathers' company, under command of Col. John Huber, in the years 1778 and '79. (Pa. Archives, series V, Vol. vii, pages 874 and 897).

Geo. Weachter, was a member of Capt. Michael Oberly's company, March 21, 1781, and December 10, 1781. (Pa. Archives, V series, Vol. vii, pages 244 and 254). Mr. Weachter was the father-in-law of Peter Elser, Jr.

Michael Oberlin, Capt. November 1, 1782, John Huber Sub. Lieut., also March 21, 1781. (Pa. Archives, V series, Vol. vii, p. 308 and 243).

Michael Oberlie (Oberlin), was the grandfather of Catharine, wife of Samuel Elser.

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