

Robert Laughlin: Blacksmith and Pioneer

HE GAVE OUR TOWN ITS NAME

Robert Laughlin came to Ligonier Valley with General Forbes' army and remained after the troops returned to the east. The first party of soldiers was led across Laurel Hill by Colonel Burd on September 3, 1758. Laughlin, a blacksmith, may have been one of the workers or sutlers for the army, rather than a soldier. A deed reveals that on June 14, 1769 Robert Laughlin, blacksmith, of Ligonier, received title to two hundred acres of land adjoining the town of Ligonier on the Loyalhanna Creek. Laughlin sold the property, which included his improvements on the east side of the Loyalhanna, to Thomas Galbraith, innkeeper, on November 20, 1773 for 65 pounds Pennsylvania currency.¹

According to the Laughlin Family History, Robert Laughlin married Mary Patton of New Alexandria, Westmoreland County, on May 16, 1776. Their eldest child, James, was born June 16, 1777; Jane, their youngest child, on April 5, 1797.

The Provincial Council (now the Legislature) met in Philadelphia Friday, Sept. 25, 1789 and approved payment to Laughlin for blacksmith work done in 1777, during the construction of Fort Preservation, the Revolutionary War fort (sometimes referred to as Fort Ligonier) on the eastern edge of Ligonier. The amount was ten pound, six shillings and eight pence.²

Laughlin held title to a tract of land around present-day Laughlintown which was surveyed upon a warrant dated November 18, 1789.³ He was living here by September 16, 1793 when he sold a part of the tract to Thomas Fisher, tavern keeper, of Fairfield Township, because one of the points in the deed description is a spring at the corner of

Laughlin's garden. Laughlin is identified as a blacksmith. On March 1, 1796 he sold another 77 acres to Thomas Fisher of Fairfield Township.

Thomas Fisher, who was by then living in Donegal Township, purchased an additional eight acres of Laughlin's land on April 17, 1797. The deed description reads: "beginning at a corner white oak tree on the line between said Laughlin & Fisher & east of said Laughlins Smith Shop on the new State road", another point is "to Robert Laughlins new cleared land".⁴ On June 12, 1798 Laughlin sold Thomas Fisher a one-and-a-half acre parcel of ground adjoining land previously sold to Thomas Fisher and a lot belonging to William Jameson. It was "a tryangle piece of Ground north of the new State Road opposite the dwelling house of Robert Laughlin & also of his Smith Shop".⁵ These deeds show that Laughlin's blacksmith shop was one of the earliest businesses in the Laughlintown area.

In 1797 James Updegraff was engaged to prepare a draft of "East Liberty," the town Laughlin wished to lay out along the new State Road. On June 7, 1797 Updegraff gave Laughlin the plan, which is now in the possession of the Compass Inn Museum. The plan called for lots to be 60' by 160' on the Main Street. A 16 1/2' wide alley was to run parallel to Main Street along the back of the lots. The town is noted as being one mile from the Loyalhanna Creek and one mile from Westmoreland Furnace. Laughlin adapted the plan in several ways. The lot size of 60' by 160' was kept but lots were only laid out on both sides of Main Street with none on the cross street, which was reduced in width to 40'. The two alleys in back of the lots were also reduced in width to 12'. He then advertised the

town lots for sale in the "Pittsburg Gazette." 6

The deed for the first lots sold in East Liberty, dated April 10, 1798, identifies Robert Laughlin as a blacksmith and John Cairns, who bought lots 6 and 8, as a laborer. Laughlin sold at least 12 lots in East Liberty during 1798 -1799. Most sold for \$20. Both Robert Laughlin and his wife Mary could read and write, as they signed their names on the deeds.

By August 1803 the Laughlins had moved from East Liberty and were living about two miles from New Alexandria, Derry Township. Mary Laughlin states in her will that she had inherited this property from her uncle, James Blaine.

A clear title was received by Robert Laughlin for his property at East Liberty, when on July 19, 1803, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania granted him a patent for a tract of land called "Manor Cunningham". The tract contained 262 1/2 acres, in Donegal Township, Westmoreland County. On August 23, 1803 he issued quit claim deeds to those

who had received deeds for lots in East Liberty under his land warrant.

Robert Laughlin and his wife Mary sold the remainder of "Manor Cunningham", 124 acres and 15 perches, to Thomas Fisher for \$2,233. The deed is dated August 27, 1803. The sale excluded the town of East Liberty with its streets and alleys, except those lots which at the time remained unsold.

In his will of February 2, 1809, Robert Laughlin lists his family as his wife Mary; daughters Ann, Susannah, Mary, and Jenny; sons James and Robert; and grandsons Robert Manson and Robert Laughlin. He died July 26, 1809 and was buried in the cemetery at Congruity Presbyterian Church north of Route 22 and west of New Alexandria. The only other member of his family known to be buried there is his grandson Robert Laughlin.

In her will Mary Laughlin mentions her daughter Jenny, her son James, and her daughter Mary,

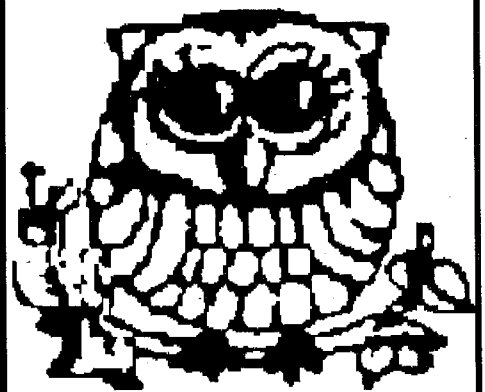
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whose married name was Mary Horrell. Mary Laughlin died April 22, 1826. Her grave has not been located.



1. Deed Book Vol. A - P. 53
2. PA Colonial Records Vol. 16 - P. 170
3. Deed Book Vol. 1 - P. 506; Vol. 2 - P. 598; Vol. 4 - P. 39
4. Deed Book Vol. 2 - P. 605
5. Deed Book Vol. 4 - P. 39. This description, as in many old deeds with ambiguous run-on sentences and lack of punctuation, probably means the white oak tree, rather than the smith shop, was situated on the new State Road,
6. Deed Book Vol. 4 - P. 335; Vol. 7 - P. 80, 81; Vol. 15 - P. 489

