Old Frackville Tales

Lorraine Stanton

Franklin School in early 1900s, W.R. Trautman teaching

Mrs. Carrie Kiefer 322 West Spring Street was born in Frackville and lived on North Railroad Avenue when she was a child. She attended school at the Franklin Building and left in the ninth grade to help out at home where there were seven children. They then moved to North Balliet St. and lived next to her aunt and uncle who owned the Hillanbrand Hotel. She recalled that travelers and boarders stayed here, Mrs. Hillanbrand served three meals a day and had to prepare for as many as twenty-two overnight guests at one time Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hillanbrand built this hotel and dances were held here for many years. When the dance era faded this hall was used as a roller skating rink. The Helene Electrical Store was located on the other side of the Kiefer home and Mrs. Kiefer remembers it well. She remembered the Meredith home across the street and the beautiful pond where Studlick’s Hall is now located. Mrs. Kiefer’s Aunt Lena Miller was married to the contractor in charge of the construction of the first culvert. She recalled that travelers and boarders stayed here, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hillanbrand built this hotel and dances were held here for many years. When the dance era faded this hall was used as a roller skating rink. The Helene Electrical Store was located on the other side of the Kiefer home and Mrs. Kiefer remembers it well. She remembered the Meredith home across the street and the beautiful pond where Studlick’s Hall is now located.

Mrs. Kiefer’s Aunt Lena Miller was married to James Meredith and he was the first child born in Frackville. He rode as guest of honor in the Old Home Week Parade and was 63 years old at this time. Her grandfather, Henry W. Miller moved to town when there were only four or five families located here. He was the contractor in charge of the construction of the first culvert. She recalled the Gyp Fulton Stone Tavern on North Lehigh Avenue where the Miller Gas Station is located and remembered what a beautiful building it was. The stagecoaches stopped here and Mr. Fulton bought and sold horses. She also remembered that George Ernst was the former owner of this hotel. Her husband Lawrence Kiefer went hunting with Mr. Hicks, father of Judge Hicks. Hunting was a great sport in the old days and game was abundant. Mr. Kiefer was especially fond of pheasant and they hunted in the woods beyond the West End Field. Her father, Henry Miller, was yardmaster for the Reading Company and worked at the Plane. A terrible accident occurred when he was thrown under the cars. Both legs were amputated and he was taken to the Ashland Hospital at Fountain Springs. He was fitted with artificial limbs, within six weeks was walking, and in a year was back working at the Plane. He was a car checker for many years and passed away at the age of 89.

Mrs. Kiefer next lived at 115 North Center Street and resided here for many years. Her son, Bernard Kiefer and family still reside here. Frackville was not fully developed or populated and beautiful chestnut trees extended from Center Street to the west of the town. She talked about the friendliness of the neighbors and the graciousness of Mrs. Hicks and Mrs. Trautman. Her daughter, Joan Fennelly, with whom she resides, mentioned the first time she saw a chauffeur or Scotty dog was when Mrs. Hicks’ sister came to visit and had a beautiful black automobile with a chauffeur who walked this dog up and down Center street. The Hicks’ garden was beautiful with its shrubbery and round umbrella tables. A fulltime gardener was credited with the upkeep of this lovely garden.

She recalled that Charles Lawrence sold stoves in the Bradley Building which is now owned by Fred Brennan. His store occupied the rooms now occupied by the Arcuri Barbershop. Her father-in-law, Daniel Kiefer, was the first news agent in town and sold candy, cigarettes and newspapers when they were a penny a piece. He was a volunteer custodian of St. Joseph’s Church and fired the pot belly stove before services began by starting the fire at 2 a.m. so that the church was heated. He lost one hand in an accident and was kidded when he collected in an accident because as his friends said, “he couldn’t help himself.”

Mrs. Kiefer remembered the Harrison K. Reich Shoe Store at 2 North Balliet Street where the McMullen News Agency is now located and the Frackville Fire House when all the firemen had a large wheel and hose—but no truck. The firemen pulled this wheel containing the hose to the fire by manpower.

I had a lovely visit with Carrie, as she would rather be called. I agreed with her when she commented on what a lovely town we have.