

Ewing Settlers of Southwestern Pennsylvania

Part 5: Uniontown History

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Several James Ewing of Inch descendants who settled the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area just before and after the Revolutionary War have been discussed in previous articles in this series.¹ This includes many of-the-land Ewing farmers who settled the Robinson Township area just to the west of Pittsburgh.

In the fourth part of this series, the scope was broadened to include the heritage of a prominent citizen of Uniontown, Fayette County, Pennsylvania – the Honorable Nathaniel Ewing (1794-1874) – who was a distinguished member of the bar.

This fifth part of the series of articles on the Ewing settlers of southwestern Pennsylvania expands the previous material regarding the role of Ewings in the Uniontown area. The first subsection below – Nemacolin's Trail – describes a major route which supported migration from the East Coast to the southwestern Pennsylvania area, subsequently provided a route supporting invasion of the area during the French and Indian War, and, current-day, supports travelling to the west via Route 40. J. David Ewing's second subsection begins an exploration and explanation of the history of the area from way-back, centuries ago, to the late-1700s migration of settlers, Ewings in particular, to the area. Virginia Okie's third subsection gives some additional information about the heritage of the Honorable Nathaniel Ewing (1794-1874).

This article, among other things, initiates a focus on the value of attending the upcoming 2010 Gathering, to be held at the elegant, historic *Summit Inn* in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, September 23-26, 2010. The natural beauty – especially in late September – and the history of the area provides a strong draw. The Ewing-heritage of Uniontown and the surrounding southwestern Pennsylvania area should make for a very interesting and genealogically valuable get-together. This part of the series starts to identify the many activities – environmentally and genealogically interesting – gathering attendees will find valuable.

Nemacolin's Trail

Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nemacolin's_Path)

The following is taken from Wikipedia's Internet web site. It is included here to provide readers with some interesting insights regarding the history of the Uniontown area. Readers wishing to further explore this topic should go to the Internet site cited above and use its copious links.

Nemacolin's Path or more often Nemacolin's Trail was a Native American trail situated to cross the great-barrier of the Allegheny Mountains via the Cumberland Narrows Mountain pass and connect between the Potomac River and the Monongahela River watersheds on either side of the Allegheny range of the USA. Nemacolin's Trail thus connected Cumberland, Maryland with what became Brownsville, Pennsylvania. It was an ancient Indian trail, and when improved

¹ These articles may be accessed online at www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org/Project_SWPA_Articles.html.

around 1750 became the template trail, in large part the actual route for what became known on the eastern slopes as the eastern part of Braddock's Road, and which later evolved into the Cumberland Road, and the National Road, then the National Pike, and eventually U.S. Route 40, the so-called National Highway. To complete its historical impact, U.S. Route 40 became one of the first officially recognized highways in the United States – and the earlier road, the Cumberland Road/National Road was the road on which the first cast iron bridge in the United States was constructed. The trail became the gateway by which settlers in Conestoga Wagons,² or by stage coach were able to reach the promised lands of the American near and far west.

The trail is of immense historical importance as crossing the Allegheny divide was a major task taking much planning, time and effort until well into the twentieth century – as evidenced by the lack of east-west highways for the length of the border between Virginia and West Virginia – the two regions sundered by some of the harshest terrain in the mountain chain. Crossing the Allegheny range to the north of the Cumberland Gap or to the south is feasible only hundreds of miles to either the north or south as its ridgelines are oriented north-south presenting a virtually impassible obstacle to east-west travel.

Nemacolin's Path starts from a site in present day Cumberland, Maryland, continuing on to Brownsville, Pennsylvania to the neighborhood known today as Redstone located at mouth of Redstone Creek, and known formerly in colonial America as Redstone Old Fort. During 1749 and 1750, the trail was cleared by the Delaware Indian chief Nemacolin and Maryland frontiersman Thomas Cresap.

Later, during the French and Indian War, the eastern part of Nemacolin's path was used as [a] military route for General Edward Braddock's ill-fated attempt to capture Fort Duquesne which among other reasons, was forestalled by the capture of the force under Colonel George Washington at Fort Necessity where he was staging supplies for a move down to the western trail head and crossing point on the Monongahela at Redstone Creek (now Brownsville, Pennsylvania).

Brief History of the Uniontown Area

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Located thirteen miles north of the Mason-Dixon Line and fifty miles southeast of Pittsburgh, Uniontown has been a part of America's development from the very beginning.

To really understand the significance of this area in southwestern Pennsylvania, and Uniontown in particular, one has to go back many millions of years when a seam, nine feet thick, of the purest coal in the world was laid down by the dense swamp vegetation of that period. This coal seam, known as the Pittsburgh Seam, lies under this area for a fifty-mile radius. After its discovery in the early 1800s, it became the fuel that powered the steel industry to allow Pittsburgh to become an American keystone of the industrial revolution.

² For more information about Conestoga Wagons and their use in settling the areas to the west, see: McClure, Jean. Great Philadelphia Wagon Road, *J. Clan Ewing*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (August 2007), pp. 15-20. This article is available online at: www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org/2008_Gathering/articles/GreatRoad_Final.pdf.

Prior to this boom period, Uniontown gained significance from its location on the western side of the Allegheny Mountains, just four miles from the base of Chestnut Ridge. Chestnut Ridge is the western most peak of the mountain range upon which is built the *Summit Inn* where the 2010 Gathering will be held. From this site, one can view the flatlands, to the west, which must have been a welcome sight to settlers traveling west over the Allegheny Mountains from Maryland on the path which is now the National Road (a.k.a. U.S. Rt. 40).

After descending the western slope of the Chestnut Ridge, travelers came first to Hopwood, Pennsylvania, a village which was a resting spot providing many taverns and inns. During its early history, Hopwood was a stopping place for six different U.S. Presidents on their way to the nation's Capital. Three miles west of Hopwood, the National Road came to Uniontown which is bisected by this highway to the present day. Settled by Jacob and Henry Beeson, who laid out the lots of the town in the mid-1700s, the town prospered. It was incorporated on July 4, 1776, and grew as settlers stopped and stayed instead of moving further west. Plenty of flat, fertile land was available. This was very attractive to many, including George Washington who purchased several thousand acres twelve miles north of Uniontown.

The economy of the day was geared toward the National Road, construction of which was funded by Congress in 1808 as the first Federal road project. An excellent presentation of the history of this highway is available at the Fort Necessity History Center.³ Construction of the National Road vastly supported the arrival of the first Ewing families in the area.

Nathaniel Ewing and two of his sisters were the first Ewings to come to Uniontown in 1788; he was the appointed 'Land officer and Registrar for the Northwest Territories'. Nathaniel moved on to Vincennes, Indiana, and established/built the 'Mount Clair' plantation estate where the first *Clan Ewing in America* Gathering was hosted by Rev. Ellsworth Ewing in the fall of 1988. Nathaniel's triple-great-grandson, Nathaniel Mark Ewing, a member of the U.S. Congress, currently resides in the original house.⁴

William Ewing, Nathaniel's brother, came from York County, Pennsylvania, as a single man and surveyor in 1790. He married Mary Conwell and fathered ten children. He settled in the Dunlap's Creek area eight miles west of Uniontown. William and his son George were the contractors for a portion of the National Pike between Brownsville and Scenery Hill to the west of Uniontown. William's other sons included Judge Nathaniel (Uniontown), Judge George (Houston Texas), and James (Dunlap's Creek), my double-great-grandfather.

From these Ewing roots many of you are descended. In the records of the Fayette County Court House, where the portraits of five Ewing judges are displayed, as well as the Pennsylvania Room of the Uniontown Library, there is a wealth of information which may help in your ongoing research.

³ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Necessity_National_Battlefield

⁴ For further information about this house, see: Nathaniel Ewing Homestead, *Ewing Family J.*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (August 2009), pp. 15-17. This article will soon be posted to the Ewing Family Association's web site: www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org.

Ewing Judges and Lawyers

Virginia Ewing Okie (*vokie at digital dot net*)

Uniontown is a very special place for me since it is the birthplace for both my parents and they spent their childhood in what my father called *God's County*.

To prepare myself for the upcoming gathering, and to try to help others to prepare, I recently re-acquainted myself with the material I have accumulated about Ewings in the Uniontown area. I discovered that I had many items pertaining to judges who served in the courts of Fayette County, Pennsylvania. Fayette County was created on September 26, 1783, from part of Westmoreland County, and named for the Marquis de Lafayette. Uniontown is its county seat.

Using Google to search the Internet, I found the following book:

Crumrine, Boyd. *The Courts of Justice, Bench and Bar of Washington County, Pennsylvania: with sketches of the early court-houses, the judicial system, the law judges, and the roll of attorneys of that county; and a history of the erection and dedication of the court-house of 1900; with portraits and illustrations*. Originally Published: Washington, Pa.: Washington Bar Association, 1902. Collection: Historic Pittsburgh Full-Text Collection.⁵

A brief biographical sketch of my great-great-great-grandfather – Nathaniel Ewing (1794-1874) – starts on page 52B of this book. This Nathaniel Ewing was discussed in a previous article in this series about settlers of southwestern Pennsylvania.⁶ He built a Federal-style building around 1826 on property belonging to George Washington near Uniontown, Fayette County, Pennsylvania. The building, called the Mount Washington Tavern, has been restored to be used as the Fort Necessity Museum.

On page 54 of the book, Nathaniel's parents are identified as William Ewing and Mary Conwell. This William Ewing came to Fayette County around 1790 as a surveyor. Nathaniel was born July 18, 1794, and died in 1874; he is buried in Uniontown's Oak Grove Cemetery, Section 18.

The book further indicates that Nathaniel's grandfather was George Ewing of Peach Bottom, York County, and George was a brother of Rev. Dr. John Ewing.

The book provides a short biographical sketch of Nathaniel's son, Judge John Kennedy Ewing (1823-1905), on page 58B. Following



Possibly: Ellen L. Willson (1826-84)

⁵ Two digitized, searchable versions of this book may be found on the Internet. The first is provided by the Google Books Project; go to books.google.com and search for 'Crumrine'. The other may be found by going to Historic Pittsburgh's list of online books – digital.library.pitt.edu/p/pitttextall – and searching for 'Courts of Justice, Bench and Bar of Washington County'. Both of these postings contain the images which appeared in the book.

⁶ Ewing, Joseph Neff Jr., Virginia Ewing Okie and William Ewing Riddle. *Ewing Settlers of Southwestern Pennsylvania, Part 4: Nathaniel Ewing (1794-1874), J. Clan Ewing*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (May 2008), pp. 35-41. Available online at www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org/Project_SWPA_Articles.html.

it is a short biographical sketch of my great-great-grandfather, John Kennedy Ewing, and his wife Ellen Louis Willson (1826-84). I believe the photograph on the previous page is of her, and I have a wedding dress in my possession that is believed to have been hers.

Many of these Ewings were judges in the Fayette County court system. Another book – *A History of Uniontown; The County Seat of Fayette County Pennsylvania* written by James Hadden and published in 1913⁷ – mentions oil paintings of the judges which hung on walls of the large court room.

So ... What Might this Mean for Activities During the 2010 Gathering?

2010 Gathering attendees should definitely visit court houses in Fayette County, not only to search vital records, but also to find paintings and similar documentation regarding possibly-ancestral judges. J. David Ewing, reports that there are portraits of Ewing judges on display in the Court House in Uniontown, and a 'behind the scenes' tour of parts of the court house which are not normally accessible to the public might be arranged.

Do you have any judges or lawyers in your family? Maybe you can find paintings of them hanging on the court house walls. Maybe your ancestor did not become a judge but was an active lawyer. There should be many court cases where they are mentioned and may even have their signature attached. If any of the above appears to match your heritage, join us in finding and analyzing the material available in the Uniontown area regarding Ewings.

In addition, a visit to Fort Necessity where George Washington fought his first battles against the French would be valuable for people whose ancestors settled the southwestern Pennsylvania area. It might help in understanding not just the 'facts and figures' ancestral details but also the life and times of your Pittsburgh-area ancestral settlers.

Virginia Ewing Okie was born Virginia Ewing Husted. When she married, she kept her middle name, Ewing, to recognize that she was named after her maternal great-grandmother, Belle Kennedy Ewing, a daughter of Hon. John Kennedy Ewing. Her genealogical research concerns the Evans, Ewing, Howell, Husted, Kennedy, Loudon, McClelland, Rowe, Willard and Willson families.

William Ewing Riddle is a great-great-great-grandson of Squire James Ewing (a son of Alexander who was a son of James Ewing of Inch Island). Bill is Web Master for the Ewing Family Association web site and Editor of the Ewing Family Journal. Outside his genealogical work, he helps organizations certify that their software development procedures satisfy regulatory requirements and lead to high-quality products. He holds advanced degrees from Cornell and Stanford and has worked in academia, industry and government.

⁷ This book has been digitized by the Google Book Project; go to books.google.com and search for 'History of Uniontown; The County Seat'.

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