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TRADITIONS, LEGENDS, AND HISTORY OF TRAPPE
by W.W. Webster

It is not possible to do justice to the history of the town of Trappe without making some allusion to the legends and traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation relative to its very earliest settlement. Some of these legends are colorful and picturesque, and appeal vividly to the imagination, and there is reason to affirm that some of these are based on credible and authentic data although they must be ascribed to that which is purely pre-historic, no written record of them being now available. Territory over which the American Indians roamed their hunting grounds and fought their battles with alien tribes, is always full of imagery and legend, the white settlers catching the story from the Indians and passing it on to their children without bothering to inscribe it on the written record. And even had they so written it, it has become lost in the elapse of time. Neither the annals of poetry or of prose have preserved the stories for the enlightenment of posterity.

One of the most interesting legends of the manner in which the early settlement obtained its name is that, some two hundred years ago, there was located adjacent to where the town now lies a monastery of French Monks, called Trappists. The house which sheltered this celebrated order of priests still stands just outside of the town in the home once owned by Mr. Harvey Slaughter, and now occupied by Mr. John Marshall.

A visit to this house and an inspection of both its exterior and interior shows evidence of its having at one time been a cloister. Here, it is alleged, these Monks harbored themselves from the enticements of the world and performed their daily sacred devotions.

With the arrival of the first white settlers in the year 1663, there was a small remnant of this order of Monks still extant and performing their devotional offices in this monastic retreat, and the early settlers acquired the beautiful name of La Trappe for the designation of their future habitation. Subsequently the word "La" was dropped and that of "Trappe" retained. Where this monastic order came from, how they changed [sic] to migrate here, whither they departed, whether some of them have their final sepulchers on the premises of the old home, is shrouded in impenetrable mystery and will never be revealed to the light of truth. However, it is pleasant to believe that the little town was nurtured amid such spiritual and sacred environment.

There is another tradition which while not so religiously colorful as this one, is absorbingly fascinating from an entirely opposite environment. It is alleged that the first building erected by these emigrants in 1663 was a log house which stood for many years on the very spot where now stands the building in which Mr. Courtney Valliant transacts his grocery business and which is owned by the Leonard family.

This old log structure was a combination grocery store and gambling room, where spirituous liquors were sold to the weary and the thirsty. It was called the Partridge Trap for one reason or another and from that was obtained the name of Trap, by which the settlement was designated for years, gradually being converted into that of Trappe. It is alleged that anyone who entered this pioneer log building was trapped like a partridge either by the enthrallment of gambling or by the inebriating influence of

alcohol. After once entering the building no one ever left the settlement. It is not quite so pleasant to believe that the town grew and developed from such wordly environments. We like better to accept the Monkish tradition.

Probably the nearest and most plausible traditional approach to the truth is that the tribe of Choptank Indians who, many years before the foot of a white man had trod this virgin soil, came from across the waters of the Chesapeake and located hereabouts. The large river they named the Great Choptank, the lesser stream, coursing its way not far from where Trappe is now, they designated the La Trappe river because along its shores they did their trapping and hunting. The white man, coming here to habitate caught the name from the tongue of some Indian and passed it on downward through the generations. It would seem to be essentially an Indian name which, according to the traditions of the Red Man, had some interpretation which has not been learned.

Now we pass on to something that bears the earmarks of authenticity because it can be legally verified and is not befogged by the mystery of legend. It is the first gleam of truth.

In the year 1663, there came to what has since become Talbot County, a man by the name of Thomas Martin. He is said to have been the progenitor of the county. He was accompanied by his wife and his brother, John Martin. he located at a spot called Hampden and there built the house, now standing, which was for sixty years the property of the Leonard family, but now has been purchased by W.B. Hadley of Philadelphia. To Thomas Martin and his wife, who had been Elizabeth Day, of England, was born a child, Hannah Martin, who was the first white child born in Talbot County. That was in 1663, soon after his arrival here. Thomas Martin died at Hampton in 1705. As Hampden is situated about two miles from Trappe, in the Trappe district, the town really has the honor of giving the first white child to the county. The posterity of Thomas and Elizabeth Martin lived for many generations at the Hampden estate.

The unvarnished and legitimate chronicle of Trappe dates from the year 1856, just 80 years ago. It was on March 24th of that year, that what had been a settlement, then a hamlet, and subsequently a village, became an incorporated town with a Town Clerk and Town Commissioners. One hundred and twenty years of legend and tradition and only eighty years of legally substantiated data. In between the "prehistoric era" and the true historic truth lie stories of love and hate, sorrow and joy, success and failure in human lives which would be interesting could they but be brought to the light. But the stories are buried with those who played their parts in them.

By legislative enactment the village of Trappe, then, became a town in March 1856. The original Town Commissioners were Josiah Higgins, Clerk, Edward M. Hardcastle, Charles R. Mullikin, Samuel P. Dickinson, Isaac W. Jump, Robert H. Kemp. These men assembled, drew up a charter, by-laws and constitution, and proceeded, after the administration of the oath of fidelity, to transact the official business of the town. A reading into the records reveals the fact that they were faithful in the discharge of their duties. They each served for a period of two years and then were succeeded by others down to the present day.

These six men may rightfully be accredited with being the founders of the town although, of course, they were not the pioneers of the settlement. Possibly that credit can be given either to the Trappist Monks, the proprietor of the Partridge Trap, or the

tribe of Choptank Indians. More presumably to Thomas and Elizabeth Martin and John Martin, their families and offspring, and the friends who they rallied about them for the organization of a settlement.

Most of those living in the town of Trappe when it was incorporated, unless they were very young, have passed on. Many of their prosperity are reaping, and being benefitted by the fruits of their endeavors. These have striven to develop a town where the pleasant and peaceful joys of life may be indulged in far from the marts of trade and the din of maddening crowds. Here nature has been assisted by the hands of ambitious citizens, in the beautiful lawns, well maintained homes, far-reaching and dignified street canopied with overarching boughs of stately trees.

Even a brief sketch of the traditions, legends and history of Trappe would not be complete without mention of the oldest house in the immediate environs of the corporation- a stately old brick and frame structure still, with its white paint and green shutters, bearing the marks of its colonial ancestry. This is the Old Kemp Home on Main street, occupied by Miss Sarah Kemp and Mrs. Bennett Todd, granddaughter of Dr. Samuel T. Kemp who purchased the property from the original owner in 1803.

The frame portion of this old structure was built in the year 1764, and 39 years after he purchased it, Dr. Kemp added the brick part consisting of three stories. At the death of Dr. Kemp the property reverted to his son Robert H. Kemp, who lived in it until his death several years ago. Five years ago it was completely renovated by Miss Sarah Kemp, the present owner. It stands far back in a spacious lawn, surrounded by stately trees, although the ravages of time and storms have caused many of these to be uprooted.

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